

TAUNTON'S

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 1994 NO. 4

fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

CREME ANGLAISE



VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS

AN ITALIAN MENU

BERRY COBBLERS



TOMATOES

\$4.95 CAN \$5.95



09

The sign of a long, trouble-free life.

It's no secret that the life of quality cookware can be cut short by a nonstick coating that doesn't live up to its claims.

That's why more and more makers of premium and gourmet cookware are turning to DuPont AUTOGRAPH®.

Because no other nonstick will face the years better than AUTOGRAPH. Its specially formulated combination of alloys and ultra-hard ceramic create a remarkably tough cooking surface that will resist scratching, abrasion and wear, even if you use metal utensils.

A surface so durable, you'll be able to depend on it for trouble-free cooking and cleanups for a long time to come.

So whenever you buy cookware that you expect to last, look for the label with the DuPont AUTOGRAPH on it.

It's a sure sign you're getting the best nonstick we've ever made.

Autograph®

DUPONT



C^{fine} COOKING[®]

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1994 NO. 4

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 **Letters**
- 8 **Q&A** *How cheese is made, prosciutto vs. pancetta, making the perfect omelet*
- 12 **Food Science**
Osmosis
- 14 **Notes** *Mail-order meats*
- 18 **Tips** *Reviving frozen bread, removing garlic odor, peeling ginger*
- 69 **Basics** *Nutrition math, steeling knives, peeling and seeding tomatoes, duxelles*
- 72 **Reviews**
Chinese cookbooks
- 74 **Calendar**
- 77 **Flavorings** *Basil*
- 81 **Advertiser Index**
- 81 **Recipe & Technique Index**
- 82 **Tidbits**

On the cover: *Tomatoes, p. 48; Crème Anglaise, p. 43.*

Cover photo, Suzanne Roman; inset, Robert Marsala. Photos this page: top, Martha Holmberg; middle, Ruth Lively; bottom, Robert Marsala.

ARTICLES

- 22 **Ratatouille on the Grill** *by A. Cort Sinnes*
Grilling the vegetables enlivens a traditional Mediterranean dish
- 25 **Buying Top-Notch Fish** *by Jon Rowley*
Seattle seafood expert tells how to choose good-quality fish
- 30 **Wrap Up Flavor in Vietnamese Spring Rolls**
by Nguyen Thi Thai Moreland A savory pork filling in crispy rice paper bundled up with noodles and fresh greens
- 34 **Four Courses in Italian** *by Johanne Killeen & George Germon*
Pasta is at the heart of a feast that balances flavor, texture, and color
- 40 **Keeping Knives Sharp** *by Suzanne Roman*
If you want keen edges, you've got to get abrasive
- 43 **Crème Anglaise: One Recipe, Many Desserts**
by Stephen Durfee A simple custard sauce becomes a variety of delicious and easy sweets
- 48 **Enjoying the Fresh Taste of Tomatoes** *by Jesse Cool*
Pick them at their peak, handle well, and freeze for winter use
- 52 **Tame Fiery Italian Brandy by Adding Flavor**
by Lidia Bastianich How to infuse grappa with fruit, herbs, and honey
- 55 **Roasting a Chicken to Perfection** *by Mitchel London*
Simple seasonings and a hot oven yield a bird with superb flavor and juicy texture
- 60 **Stuffing Peppers Mexican Style** *by Susan Whale*
Everything from plain cheese to savory meat and fruit picadillo tastes wonderful in *chiles rellenos*
- 64 **Cobblers and Grunts Showcase Summer Fruits**
by Jim Dodge Choose between toppings of cake, biscuit, or dumplings to contrast with juicy baked fruits



25 **Buying Fish**



22 **Grilled Ratatouille**



64 **Fruit Grunts & Cobblers**

Fine Cooking (ISSN 1072-5121) is published bimonthly by The Taunton Press, Inc., Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Tel. 203/426-8171. Application to mail at second-class postage rates is pending at Newtown, CT 06470 and at additional mailing offices. GST paid registration # 123210981. U.S. distribution by ICD/The Hearst Corporation, 250 West 55th St., New York, NY 10019 and Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870.

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Fine Cooking*, The Taunton Press, Inc., 63 South Main Street, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Printed in the USA

LETTERS

We invite you to share your thoughts, opinions, and comments with fellow readers. Please send your cards or letters to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

BREAD-KNEADING MYTHS

I bake nearly all the bread eaten in our house and have concluded that rising time and the proper balance of flour and moisture—not kneading—are the critical elements in producing a bread with a desirable texture.

My casual approach came from the distractions of parenting and an active life. I would mix the bread and let it sit for a few minutes, fully intending to knead the dough before setting it aside to rise. Sometimes I wouldn't get much kneading done, but the bread somehow turned out fine.

Today, I quickly mix the ingredients, and cover the bowl of unkneaded dough with a towel. I let it rise and punch it down as much as I like before I form the loaves. (How many times I do this never seems to matter, as long as the loaves double in volume before baking.) If I go with too little rising time, the loaves have a coarser grain and some holes.

I performed an experiment, inspired by *Fine Cooking*, in which I mixed my standard whole-wheat bread and, at the point the flour was thoroughly mixed, I divided the dough in half. One half was kneaded for 10 minutes, the other not at all. Subsequently, both were treated identically. The kneaded dough's surface was a little smoother, and the heights of the loaves were nearly identical.

It appears kneading bread is an example of what we behavioral biologists call "superstitious behavior." Generations of cooks have made fine bread while kneading and assumed it was required for good results. Perhaps some cooks got poor results with less kneading, but didn't realize a lack of rising time was the important factor.

—Barbara N. Benson,
Coopersburg, PA

CLEANING CLAMS

In *Fine Cooking* #2, a Tip suggests soaking live clams in water containing cornmeal before cooking them. Indeed, this always should be done because it allows

the clams to purge themselves of trapped sand and other debris. Most important, especially if you're going to eat them raw on the half-shell, cornmeal will prompt the clams to eliminate what may be delicately referred to as previously digested meals.

However, this won't work in plain water, as your contributor suggests. Clams stay "clammed up" unless they think they're safe at home. So, soak them in imitation sea water: four teaspoons of salt to every quart of water. The clams will also fail to open their shells if the water doesn't contain enough oxygen. This means you mustn't crowd them, or leave them in the water for more than an hour or so. Finally, place the purging bowl in a quiet location. Strong vibrations will spook them into clamping up again.

—Robert L. Wolke, Pittsburgh, PA

HERESY IN THE KITCHEN

I was delighted to see you approve of cast iron—I use it whenever possible. And—heresy—I *always* wash it. If it's old, it goes in the dishwasher. If I must, I hand-wash the cookware and dry it with paper towels.

—Barbara W. Wood, Hancock, NH

KEEPING GANACHE TOGETHER

Inherently, ganache is a relatively unstable emulsion that will always try to separate as we try to emulsify it—not always with full success. To minimize the risk of curdling when adding flavor to ganache, recently I've had luck adding flavoring ingredients immediately after mixing the chocolate and cream. Adding flavoring when the ganache is still a tepid, fluid mixture, rather than waiting until the ganache has cooled to room temperature, definitely reduces the risk of curdling.

—Ortrud Carstens, New York, NY

Editor's note: Ortrud Carstens wrote "Ganache—A Marriage of Chocolate and Cream," which appeared in *Fine Cooking* #2.

KEEPING GANACHE TOGETHER: PART II

Your article on ganache ended on a note of despair frequently experienced by amateur and professional alike when they face a "broken" ganache. In technical

*C*fine COOKING

Publisher/Editor Jan Wahlin

Art Director Steve Hunter

Managing Editor Martha Holmberg

Assistant Editors

Suzanne Roman, Dana Harris

Copy/Production Editor Li Agen

Editorial Secretary Kim Landi

Development Editor Ruth Rohde Lively

Recipe Tester Abigail Johnson Dodge

Design Director Susan Edelman

Editorial Director John Lively

Circulation Coordinator Sarah Roman

Public Relations Manager Donna Pierpont

Advertising Manager Tom Leihbacher

Advertising Accounts Manager Doris Hanley

Advertising Sales Coordinator Nancy Crider

Marketing Secretary Christine Ferguson

How to contact The Taunton Press:

Telephone: 800/283-7252
203/426-8171

Fax: 203/426-3434

Subscriptions:
Orders: 800/888-8286
Customer Service: 800/477-8727

Advertising Sales: 800/283-7252 x 547

Retail Sales: 800/283-7252 x 238

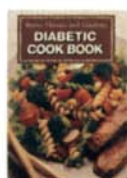
Copyright 1994 by The Taunton Press, Inc. No reproduction without permission of The Taunton Press, Inc. *Fine Cooking*® is a registered trademark of The Taunton Press, Inc. Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions, \$26 for one year, \$42 for two years, \$58 for three years; other countries, \$32 for one year, \$52 for two years, \$72 for three years (in U.S. dollars, please). Single copy, \$4.95. Single copies outside U.S. and possessions, \$5.95. Address correspondence to the appropriate department (Subscription, Editorial, or Advertising), The Taunton Press, 63 South Main St., PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

Writing an article

Fine Cooking welcomes articles, proposals, manuscripts, photographs, and ideas from our readers, amateur or professional. We'll acknowledge all submissions, return those we can't use, and pay for articles we publish. Send your contributions to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.



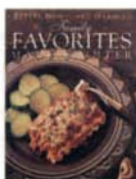
7520
PUB. PRICE: \$9.95



4017
PUB. PRICE: \$12.95



4597
PUB. PRICE: \$19.95



6244
PUB. PRICE: \$14.95
Softcover

The only book club in America
devoted to cooking invites
you to a:



6742
PUB. PRICE: \$14.95
Softcover



5647
PUB. PRICE: \$24.95



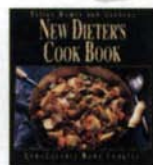
5497
PUB. PRICE: \$49.90
Counts as two books



6216
PUB. PRICE: \$22.00



8570
PUB. PRICE: \$24.95



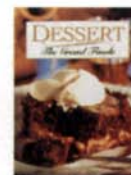
3371
PUB. PRICE: \$29.95



5250
PUB. PRICE: \$16.95



2861
PUB. PRICE: \$18.95



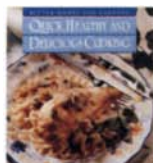
5513
PUB. PRICE: \$29.95



5027
PUB. PRICE: \$30.00



5555
PUB. PRICE: \$18.95
Softcover



5194
PUB. PRICE: \$19.95



3814
PUB. PRICE: \$19.95



5492
PUB. PRICE: \$18.00



4236
PUB. PRICE: \$16.95



3409
PUB. PRICE: \$14.95



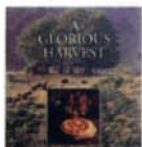
5458
PUB. PRICE: \$25.00



5643
PUB. PRICE: \$18.00



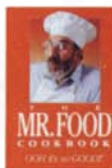
2481
PUB. PRICE: \$17.95



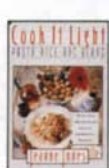
3373
PUB. PRICE: \$34.95



5375
PUB. PRICE: \$15.00



2342
PUB. PRICE: \$12.95



5374
PUB. PRICE: \$24.00



3323
PUB. PRICE: \$30.00



4837
PUB. PRICE: \$25.00



4100
PUB. PRICE: \$18.95



4426
PUB. PRICE: \$22.00



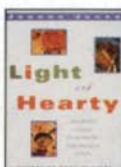
3169
PUB. PRICE: \$23.00



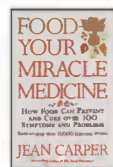
4234
PUB. PRICE: \$12.95
Softcover



4729
PUB. PRICE: \$19.95



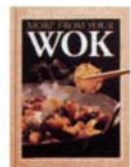
6071
PUB. PRICE: \$24.00
Softcover



5111
PUB. PRICE: \$25.00



4157
PUB. PRICE: \$25.00



6243
PUB. PRICE: \$9.95



4981
PUB. PRICE: \$12.95
Softcover

How the Cook Book Club Works:

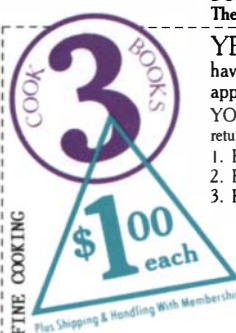
Pick any 3 books from this ad for just \$1.00 each, plus shipping and handling and applicable sales tax. Then, if you wish, choose a 4th book at half off the publisher's price. If you're not satisfied with your introductory shipment, return it within 2 weeks and we'll cancel your membership promptly. You will owe nothing.

You'll receive the Cooks' Catalog 13 times a year plus 1 special Member mailing — brimming with dozens of books and other offerings. If you want the Editors' Choice, do nothing; it will be sent to you automatically. Otherwise, use the reply form to order any books or accessories you'd like. If you don't want anything simply say so on the reply form.

You always have at least 10 days to review each Cooks' Catalog and decide whether or not to accept the Editors' Choice. If your Catalog is ever delayed and you receive an Editors' Choice without having had at least 10 days to decide, you may return it at our expense for full credit.

As a club member you can pick and choose what you want, when you want. All you agree to buy is only two more books or accessories during the next 12 months. You may then cancel your membership at any time.

Your satisfaction is always guaranteed. If one of the offerings disappoints you — for any reason at all — return it and owe nothing.



DON'T DELAY! Complete this coupon today and mail to:
The Cook Book Club, P.O. Box 4513, Des Moines, IA 50336-4513.

YES! please enroll me as a member of the COOK BOOK CLUB and send the 3 books I have filled in here for only \$1.00 each (plus shipping and handling, and sales tax where applicable). I understand the Membership Plan as described in this advertisement.

YOUR GUARANTEE: If for any reason you are not satisfied with the introductory shipment, you may return your books within 2 weeks. Your membership will be cancelled and you will owe nothing.

1. Have you bought anything through direct mail in the past ☐ 6 months ☐ 12 months ☐ Never
2. How do you pay for your mail order purchases? ☐ Credit Card ☐ Check ☐ Money Order ☐ Cash
3. How many books have you purchased in the past year? ☐ None ☐ 1-5 ☐ 6 or more

Indicate Cookbook Choices Here

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

ACT NOW AND GET AN EXTRA BOOK AT 50% OFF.

Use this box to get a 4th book at half price.

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Name _____ Signature _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

This offer is valid in the United States. All orders are subject to routine credit approval. Enrollment subject to acceptance by the Cook Book Club. We reserve the right to cancel your membership at any time. Copyright 1994. Meredith Corporation. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A. This offer expires March 31, 1995.

S/F '94

terms, they're dealing with "reversed emulsion," one in which the water and water-soluble elements are surrounded by the oily elements of the composition. This is the same phenomenon observed in broken mayonnaise, and it may be repaired in much the same fashion.

In the case of ganache, boil a small amount of cream (1/4 cup). Whisk it into the ganache mixture *very* slowly at first, gradually increasing the rate as you continue whisking. The resulting mixture may be softer due to the additional cream and certainly will contain more air bubbles, but it will behave as well as a properly mixed ganache.

You can also put a broken ganache in a food processor fitted with the metal blade and run the processor until a marked change occurs in the appearance (and sound) of the mixture. The finished product will be noticeably thicker and glossier. In both of these methods, it is essential that the ganache be kept warm. Agitation of an even slightly cool ganache will reverse the emulsion again.

—Jim Graham, *chocolatier*,
Wheeling, IL

USING SODIUM NITRATE TO CURE MEAT

Editor's note: We've had several inquiries about the availability and safety of the sodium nitrate used in Jean Jacob's *demi-sel* recipe that we ran in "Home-Cured Pork" (*Fine Cooking* #2). Many readers are confused about the relationship between nitrates and nitrites and about the health risks associated with these chemicals.

The first thing to clarify is that "salt-

peter" can mean either *sodium* nitrate or *potassium* nitrate. Chef Jacob's recipe calls for *sodium* nitrate, so be sure to specify this when purchasing the chemical.

Both sodium *nitrate* (NaNO₃) and sodium *nitrite* (NaNO₂) have been used for centuries for curing foods. With refrigeration now the major means of preservation, the curing properties of these chemicals is less important than before, but many foods—ham, bacon, sausages, dried fish—still use small amounts of one or both of these substances for preserving, for flavoring, and for giving a distinctive red coloring. Nitrates not only exist as an additive to processed foods, but they also occur naturally in many vegetables.

In the early 1970s, researchers discovered that nitrites can react with other compounds to form nitrosamines, which are suspected carcinogens. These compounds, called secondary amines, are present in foods that contain protein, such as meat and fish. The nitrosamine formation takes place in the cooking process, and also can occur in the stomach.

Sodium nitrate on its own is safe, but it will convert to nitrite when it comes in contact with certain microbes that are present in raw meat.

The debate over nitrite use and safety resulted in the continued but reduced use of the chemical by commercial meat processors. If nitrites are used in food, they must be listed on the label, and the allowable amounts have been reduced (for example, in bacon the amount was reduced from 200ppm to 120ppm).

Sodium nitrate may be purchased

legally at many pharmacies, but since home-curing isn't nearly as popular as it was years ago, the product isn't always available. Morton's sells a premixed curing salt that is mostly regular salt (sodium chloride) mixed with both sodium nitrate and sodium nitrite. The mix is called Tender Quick and it can be ordered in 2-pound quantities by calling the Cumberland General Store at 800/334-4640. A senior food technologist at Morton's suggested adapting Chef Jacob's recipe to use Tender Quick with the following modification: omit the 12 ounces sea salt and the 4 tablespoons sodium nitrate, and substitute 12 ounces Tender Quick. The Morton's product should give you approximately the same curing and coloring effect. Bear in mind that the number of days required for the brine to cure a piece of meat depends greatly on how thick the meat is.

It's also important to be aware that all these curing salts are very potent chemicals. In times when home curing was commonplace, most people had a 5-pound sack of sodium nitrate on their kitchen shelf, but they knew to treat it cautiously. Today, home curers must develop good storage and handling habits to ensure that no one in the house mistakenly ingests the chemical straight, or drinks the brine solution.

(For a related discussion of brining meat, see *Food Science*, p. 12.)

ERRATUM

The telephone number for European Gift & Housewares in "Tools for Puréeing" (*Fine Cooking* #1) was incorrect. The number is 718/325-5397. ♦

Taunton PUBLICATIONS for fellow enthusiasts

The Taunton Press: Paul Roman, chairman; Janice A. Roman, president; John Lively, editor in chief & vice president; Carolyn Kovalski, administrative secretary. **Personnel:** Carol Marotti, manager; Linda Ballerini, Christine Lincoln. **Accounting:** Wayne Reynolds, controller; Patrick Lamontagne, manager; Jeffrey Sherman, Mary Sullivan, Andrea DuBois, Carol Diehm, Lawrence Rice, Gayle Hammond, Judith Rivera, Lydia Krikorian, Elaine Yamin. **Corporate Design:** Susan Edelman, director. **Promotion:** Philip Allard, manager; D. J. Arneson, Wendy Bowes, Christopher Casey, Julia Brine, Mary Beth Cleary, Francesca Arminio, Donna Confalone. **Book Art/Production:** Robert Olah, manager; Henry Roth, Catherine Cassidy, Jodie Delohery, Iliana Koehler. **Book Copy/Production:** Ruth Dobseavage, manager; Peter Chapman, Pamela Purrone. **Manufacturing:** Kathleen Davis, director. **Prepress:** Austin Starbird, manager; Robert Marsala, Chansam Thammovongsa, Patricia Sigetti, Deborah Cooper, Richard Booth, Mark Coleman, William Godfrey, Laurene Jakob, Lisa DeFeo, Margot Knorr, Monica Murphy. **Print Production:** Dee Flanagan, Lynda Morris, promotion; Thomas Greco, Deborah Baldwin, books; Philip VanKirk, Tracie Pavlik,

magazines. **Video:** Craig Umanoff, Thomas Menard. **Corporate Marketing:** Peter Chidsey, director; Sarah Roman. **Corporate Trade Sales:** Dale Brown, director; Thomas Johnson, Barbara Buckalew, Donna Weinstein, Donna Pierpont, Diane Patterson, Marcie Seigel. **Fulfillment & Operations:** Thomas Luxeder, director; Jane Torrence. **Client Services:** Patricia Williamson, manager; Carolyn Arneith, Megan Sangster. **Subscriber Services:** Patricia Malouff, manager; Penny Lefferts, Karen Lewis, Barbara Smith, Siri Wheeler. **Order Processing:** Joyce McWilliam, manager; Dawn Bartram, Barbara Lowe, Marylou Thompson. **Data Entry:** Carole Ando, manager; Concetta Barczak, Bonnie Beardsley, Margaret Fainer, Madelaine Frengs, Marie Pato, Andrea Shorrock, Denise Zor. **Distribution:** Paul Seipold, manager; Grace Aumuller, David Blasko, Michael Capalbo, James Chappuis, Mary Ann Costagliola, Maureen Flynn, Linnea Ingram, Frederick Monnes, Marcia Pelillo, Alice Saxton, Astor Taylor, Robert Weinstein. **Purchasing & Facilities:** William Schappert, manager; Christopher Myers, Lois Beck, Cynthia Carroll, Sarah Hillard, Charles Hollis, Arthur Williams, Susan Nerich, John Dziadik, Oscar Garraza. **Cafeteria:** Donna Freeman, manager; Geraldine Benno, Norma-Jean Taylor. **Data Processing:** Brendan Bowe, Roger Seliga, Arthur Caron, Gabriel Dunn. **PC Systems:** Heidi Waldkirch, manager; Robert Neilsen, J. Larry Kinnear, Laurie Yeager, Rebecca Fanning.

California's "Wine" Country Delivered To Your Door

**Savor the best new wines
from California's
"undiscovered" wineries.**

When you subscribe, you will receive monthly two different bottles of premium "limited availability" wines from one of California's 'undiscovered' wineries. Our wine taster scours the California vineyards to find the best new small wineries that are producing outstanding quality wines in limited quantities. You will also receive our exclusive newsletter, introducing you to the wines and their winery.

Additional quantity orders
at discount prices.
Gift subscriptions available.

Only \$26.50 per month
delivered to your home or office
You may cancel anytime



*"Your direct connection to the
Winemakers of California"*

Special Offer: for the readers of Fine
Cooking **3 bottles for the price of 2 in
your first shipment**, plus an additional
gift when you mention this ad.

1 800 858 WINE
(9463)

Visa - MC - Discover Call 24 Hours

COLAVITA. TASTE IT. LIVE IT.

Colavita Extra Virgin Olive Oil has a delicate taste that imparts true Italian flavor — and new life — to any meal. Because, unlike many oils, Colavita Extra Virgin comes from fine Italian olives that are grown to exacting standards. Colavita Extra Virgin is made, as has been done for 2,000 years, from the first cold-pressing of these hand-picked olives.

And Colavita Extra Virgin contains no preservatives and is naturally cholesterol-free. Which makes it a very smart choice.

Colavita Extra Virgin Olive Oil. It's the difference between just eating right. And living well.

© 1994, COLAVITA USA



THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS COOKING SCHOOL IS NOW IN SESSION IN YOUR KITCHEN



THE VIDEOS

Thanks to this remarkable series of videos, now you can recreate the extraordinary cuisine of France right in your kitchen—with the world-renowned chefs of Le Cordon Bleu's famed teaching staff as your personal instructors.

During the course of each exciting, 45-minute video, you'll discover the secrets of Le Cordon Bleu's most coveted recipes...watch some of France's foremost chefs prepare incredible culinary specialties...and see close-up the classic techniques and practical methods you need to prepare a fabulous assortment of dishes from an elegant dinner for two to a memorable holiday feast.

Whether you're a professional chef, a serious amateur or looking for the perfect gift for your favorite cook, you'll find the videos—and the specialties you'll learn to create—truly magnifique!

SINGLE VIDEOS \$24.95 (\$3.00 S/H ea.)

DISPLAY SET-8 TAPES + COOKBOOK

\$198.60 (5% shipping)

CALL 800/888-4046



THE COOKBOOK

At last here's Le Cordon Bleu's first complete cookbook in English. Filled with color photos of cooking techniques and finished dishes, this 578-page hardcover book gives you in-depth instruction in the art of traditional French cuisine—along with hundreds of recipes and easy-to-follow menus. With its introduction by Le Cordon Bleu President, André Cointreau, *Le Cordon Bleu at Home* is destined to be the new classic on French cooking!

"LE CORDON BLEU AT HOME" COOKBOOK

A \$44.95 value comes Free with this offer.

CALL 800/888-4046

LIMITED OFFER

To receive complete
Video Library and "Le Cordon
Bleu at Home" Cookbook—
CALL TODAY

\$198.60
U.S.

+ 5% shipping

SAVE \$44.95

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll try to find a cooking or food professional with the answer.

HOW IS CHEESE MADE?

I have long been curious as to how cheese is made. What causes the tremendous differences between, for example, cheddar, Swiss, and Limburger? Is it the milk source, the rennet, aging, or temperature?

—Bette Mullikin, Roanoke, VA

Laura Chenel replies: There is endless variation to cheese types, but all milk, whether from cow, goat, or sheep, undergoes the same basic process to become cheese. There are four stages: curdling or coagulating the milk, separating the liquid whey from the solid curds, salting, and ripening. The many variations possible at each stage all contribute to the nature of the final cheese, which is why there are so many different types.

The source of milk and its quality, composition (fat, protein, etc.), and condition are essential determinants of a cheese's character. A bacterial starter (there are many varieties) may be added during the early stages, which gives a cheese its particular flavor and texture. The amounts and type of the coagulant used (these can range from lemon juice to rennet, an enzyme produced from animal or plant sources), the temperature of the milk, and the duration of the curdling period all affect the nature of the finished cheese.

Once the milk curdles, the curds are shaped and drained. Curds can drain naturally, which results in a softer cheese, or they can be pressed, which creates a firmer cheese. Salt helps inhibit the development of bacteria responsible for spoilage, and the amount and type of salt used contribute to the flavor of the finished product.

During the ripening period, which varies with each cheese type, cheeses undergo complex physical and chemical changes. The ripening process exposes the cheese to a number of bacterial actions. These depend on the type of microflora present in the cheese and the environment, the moisture content of

the curd, the amount of salt in the cheese, the method of cheesemaking, and the temperature and humidity of the curing room. Each cheese variety will acquire its own individual character, such as blue veining, white mold, or the holes in Swiss types.

Laura Chenel owns and operates Laura Chenel's Chèvre in Santa Rosa, California.

WHY UNSALTED BUTTER?

Why do recipes call for unsalted butter, and then added salt? What's the difference?

—Christine Park, Farmington, CT

Shannon McKinney replies: Unsalted butter is usually higher in quality. Although both unsalted and salted butter can have AA ratings, salt enhances flavor, acts as a preservative, and, therefore, masks deficiencies in the butter's quality. Unsalted butter is fresher, purer and lends the desired taste of "sweet cream" to recipes that call for its use. Do a taste test for yourself. Allow a small piece of each type to dissolve in your mouth and see which leaves a lasting "real butter" taste. *Shannon McKinney co-owns and operates McKinney & Doyle's Corner Bakery (in Pawling, New York), which was selected by Redbook last year as one of the five finest bakeries in the United States.*

MAKING THE PERFECT OMELET

I bought several highly recommended nonstick frying pans in hopes of producing the perfect omelet. No matter what I do—putting in a little more or less fat, adjusting the heat—I always end up with egg sticking to the pan, especially in the center. Is this inevitable?

—Osnat Teitelbaum, Gainesville, FL

Susan Langhorne replies: To make the perfect omelet, you must have a perfectly hot pan. You can produce a great omelet in any frying pan as long as the pan is really, really hot. Put an empty pan over high heat and wait just until you think the pan is too hot; that's when it's ready to use. A test is to sprinkle a drop of water in the pan and the water immediately "dances" very quickly.

Add fat to the pan only after the pan reaches the correct temperature. For a nonstick pan, you need only a very small

amount of fat: ¼ teaspoon is sufficient for each omelet. In standard pans (I use a 10-inch pan made of commercial aluminum), a teaspoon of fat is necessary. The fat's flavor will be apparent in the final product, so I use butter. Never use margarine; not only is its flavor inferior, but also its high water content can lower the heat of the pan. Once the butter is sizzling, be ready to put the beaten, unsalted eggs in the pan. (Salt can make the eggs stick.) The high heat of the butter is a must to form a film that insulates the egg mixture from the bottom of the pan, as well as causing the egg to "seize" and form its own insulating crust. If you want to make several omelets, wipe out the pan with a paper towel after each omelet is finished and bring the pan back to high heat before adding butter.

If you're passionate about omelet-making, you may want to designate one piece of cookware as an omelet pan. When a single pan is used for nothing but repeated omelet-making, it becomes increasingly well seasoned. To encourage seasoning, don't wash the pan with soap and water; just wipe the pan clean with a paper towel.

Susan Langhorne is a cooking teacher and food writer in Atlanta, Georgia, who began her culinary career as Dione Lucas' apprentice at The Egg Basket, a restaurant in New York City. Langhorne can make 50 perfect omelets in an hour.

CAN VINEGAR SPOIL?

Can you tell me if balsamic vinegar will spoil if it isn't capped tightly? I would like to put a pouring spout on a large bottle of balsamic, but that would leave the vinegar exposed to air.

—Linda Haines, Las Vegas, NV

Pam Chumley replies: Vinegar should be kept in a closed container, but it does not have to be tightly capped. Since the product is highly acidic, it isn't very vulnerable to the spoilage that can come with airborne bacteria. However, the vinegar's acid does not render it bullet-proof. If you want to ensure your vinegar has a long, high-quality life, it's best to keep it away from air, heat, and light, all of which can accelerate spoilage. Vinegar will last longer if you keep it in a

To Be The Best, Study With The Best.



- Olympic Award Winning Chef-Instructors
- American Culinary Federation Accredited 18-Month Degree Program in both Culinary Arts & Pastry Arts • Restaurant Management
- Financial Aid If Qualified • Lifetime, Worldwide Graduate Employment Services

1-800-844-1354



**Sullivan College's
National Center For
Hospitality Studies**

3101 Bardstown Road • Louisville, KY 40205

CHINOOK CEDAR BAKING PLANK

"The preferred method of baking your favorite fish"

When it comes to the preparation of fish, the Indians of the Pacific Northwest have long used a method which many top chefs in Seattle consider to be one of the finest — baking on cedar planks.

- Made with the highest quality Western Red Cedar
- Imparts sweet, woody flavor throughout fish
- Enhances natural flavor of poultry, meat and vegetables too
- Light and healthy way of cooking
- Simple to clean and won't absorb food odors

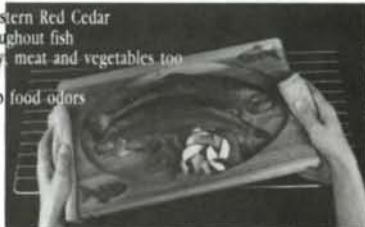


Photo by Ann C. Taylor

only \$45⁰⁰ plus s&b
To Order Call 1-800-765-4408
Money Back Guarantee

Sam & Sharon™ • 10033 63rd Avenue South • Seattle Washington 98187



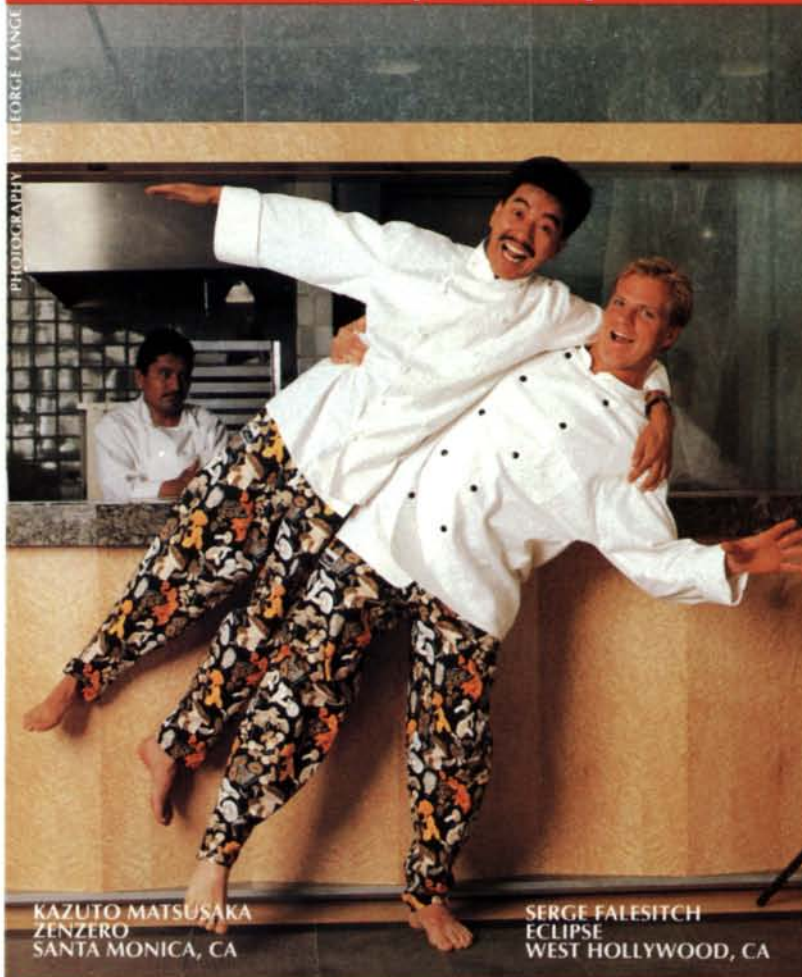
DELICIOUS GRAIN-FED BEEF

*Traceable from our
Nebraska Farm to Your Door*

USDA Inspected, Naturally-Aged Steaks, Roasts & Lean Ground Beef. Each Tender Portion Individually Hand-Trimmed, Boneless, Vacuum Packed, Flash Frozen, Labelled & Numbered. MC/Visa.

Free Brochure CALL 1-800-871-6328.
Great Plains Meats, Wisner, Nebraska.

Chefwear's Wild Mushroom Pants Are Really A Trip!



KAZUTO MATSUSAKA
ZENZERO
SANTA MONICA, CA

SERGE FALESITCH
ECLIPSE
WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA



Chefwear™ INC.

The Original
100% Cotton
Unisex Baggy Cut
Chef Pant...

Chefwear...
The Natural Choice



Call For Our Free Catalogue
800.568.2433

cool, dark, dry place. If you attach a spout that doesn't allow much air into it, that's probably acceptable. You also might consider attaching a pour spout only as you need it.

Pam Chumley is the director of technical services for The Vinegar Institute.

PROSCIUTTO VS. PANCETTA

What's the difference between prosciutto and pancetta? Can I successfully substitute other ham products that are less expensive?

—Peter Nolan, Ottawa, ON

Daniel Rosati replies: Both prosciutto and pancetta are fully cured, ready-to-eat pork products. Prosciutto is salted, air-cured ham made from the hind-quarters of a young pig. Pancetta is made from the underbelly of the pig and is the unsmoked, Italian equivalent of bacon. The meat is salted, cured in slab form for two to three weeks, seasoned, rolled, and placed in a casing, where it may cure for another two to four months. Pancetta is

considerably fattier than prosciutto, and is not often eaten raw. Raw prosciutto makes a marvelous component in an antipasto platter, and when it's wrapped around a slice of fresh, sweet melon, it's a classic appetizer. Both are often used in traditional Italian cooking for flavoring sauces and stuffings, and for larding roasted meats and fowl.

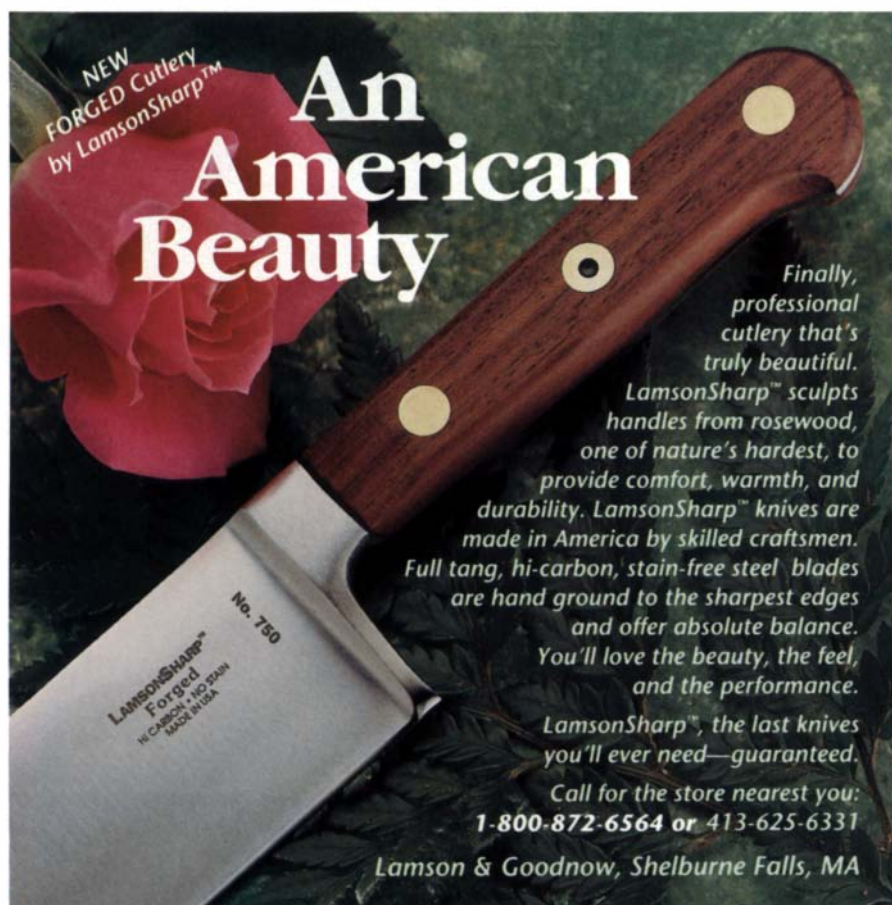
While both meats are found at Italian specialty markets, it's important to note that very little of the prosciutto—and none of the pancetta—actually comes from Italy. It's easy to tell if the prosciutto in your deli case comes from Italy: it will be very expensive and have a delicate, delicious flavor that's slightly salty and sweet. The most common imported prosciutto is Prosciutto di Parma (the name refers to its production site in Parma, Italy).

Italian prosciutto was imported into the United States until the mid-1960s, when outbreaks of animal diseases in southern Europe convinced the USDA to ban the import of certain European meats—Italian prosciutto included.

Only recently did Italian prosciutto reappear in the U.S., after Italian prosciutto producers and the USDA came to an agreement on production and control procedures in 1989. Since Italian prosciutto costs nearly twice as much as domestic prosciutto, you might want to buy domestic prosciutto when you use it in recipes and spend the extra money on imported prosciutto when you plan to feature it as is, without cooking. USDA restrictions still prevent Italian pancetta from being imported into the U.S.

Prosciutto and pancetta are as different as ham and bacon. When recipes call for cooked pancetta, regular bacon sometimes can fill in, and high-quality baked ham can take the place of prosciutto—but those inexpensive substitutes won't provide the same results as the authentic products. When a recipe calls for raw pancetta or prosciutto, no substitution is possible.

Daniel Rosati teaches classes in regional Italian cooking at the New School for Social Research in New York City. ♦



NEW
FORGED Cutlery
by LamsonSharp™

An American Beauty

Finally, professional cutlery that's truly beautiful. LamsonSharp™ sculpts handles from rosewood, one of nature's hardest, to provide comfort, warmth, and durability. LamsonSharp™ knives are made in America by skilled craftsmen. Full tang, hi-carbon, stain-free steel blades are hand ground to the sharpest edges and offer absolute balance. You'll love the beauty, the feel, and the performance. LamsonSharp™, the last knives you'll ever need—guaranteed. Call for the store nearest you: 1-800-872-6564 or 413-625-6331 Lamson & Goodnow, Shelburne Falls, MA

No. 750
LamsonSharp™
Forged
HI CARBON • NO STAIN
MADE IN USA

INDIANAPOLIS CULINARY INSTITUTE

Inspired by traditional French cuisine and today's modern lifestyle, the Indianapolis Culinary Institute is based on a special, intense twelve week program. The only one of its kind in the Midwest, this program allows students to learn and experience theory demonstration and practical application of the fund-amentals of the culinary arts.

If your goal is to work in the foodservice industry, open your own restaurant, or simply learn the secrets of professional chefs, the Indianapolis Culinary Institute will help you develop the skills you need.

Class size is limited.
Call for Information and Brochure.

(800) 334-4449

8250 Dean Road
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240



THIS INSTITUTION IS REGULATED BY
THE INDIANA COMMISSION ON
PROPRIETARY EDUCATION (AC-0100)

To Experience the Versatility of Our Specialty Cheeses Just Follow These 160 Simple Directions.

GREAT ITALIAN COOKING

Valerie A. Dominioni

Italian cheese is not just for special occasions.

You'll find 160 different ways to use Italian cheeses in Great Italian Cooking, the first Italian Specialty Cheese Cookbook. Illustrated with stunning color photography, this informative cookbook contains recipes for vegetable dishes, polenta, rice, pasta, soups, pizzas and desserts.

Cucina Classica Italiana is offering this beautiful cookbook with the purchase of any member from its family of specialty cheeses - the legendary Bel Paese®, Galbani® Mascarpone, Gorgonzola Dolcelatte®, Classica® Italico, Classica Grated Romano or Parmesan.

With Great Italian Cooking and Cucina Classica Italiana's family of specialty cheeses, authentic Italian cooking just got a little easier.



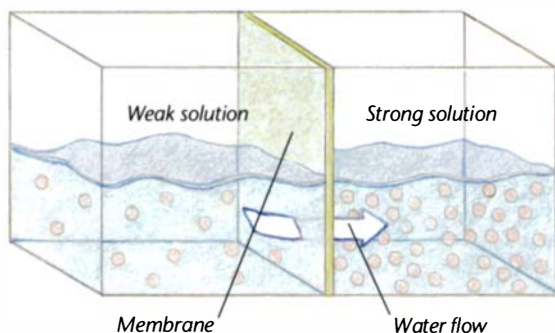
Great Italian Cooking Cookbook Offer

To receive a copy of Great Italian Cooking, please send one proof of purchase of any Classica® or Galbani® product, plus \$2.00 for shipping and handling. If you cannot find our cheeses in your local area, please send \$7.50, check or money order to: Cookbook Offer, P.O. Box 555, Brick, NJ 08723.

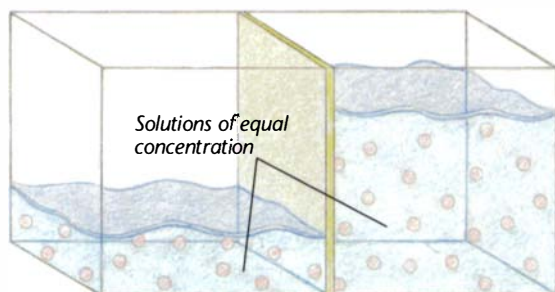
Name (Please Print) _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____
Telephone Number _____

New Jersey residents please add 6% sales tax.
Allow 4 - 6 weeks for delivery.

Osmosis—How Water Travels In and Out of Food



Water moves from weak to strong. Osmotic pressure forces water from the weak solution through the cell membrane into the strong solution (above) until the concentrations are equal (below).



What do wilted lettuce, soupy coleslaw, and corned beef have in common? They've all had water drawn out of them through a physical process called osmosis. Whenever you salt, soak, or marinate food, you may trigger osmosis, causing water to leach out or get sucked in. Understanding how osmosis works will help you turn flaccid greens crisp, drain unwanted water from fruits and vegetables, and decide when to salt meats and vegetables.

DIFFUSION IS THE FIRST STEP

To understand osmosis, it's best to begin by observing a related process called diffusion. Diffusion is the tendency of dissolved particles to flow from areas of high particle concentration into areas of low particle concentration, until the whole solution takes on one uniform concentration (see illustration above).

For example, when a sugar cube is dropped into tea, each sugar molecule attaches to a water molecule and floats away,

until the sugar cube completely dissolves. At first, the tea near the cube will be sweeter than the tea far from the cube, but the sugar molecules eventually space themselves evenly throughout the tea. This diffusion accounts for the fullness and evenness in flavor we notice in a mixture after it has been allowed to sit for awhile (professionals call this "floor time."). By itself, natural diffusion is a slow process. That's why you stir—to speed up diffusion.

OSMOSIS BALANCES THE LIQUIDS

Osmosis is a special kind of diffusion involving water, which living cells have harnessed to carry on their life processes. Osmosis is the movement of water across a membrane *from* weak solutions *toward* strong solutions. Where do you find membranes in a kitchen? Meats, vegetables, and fruits are living tissues, composed of tiny cells. Plant cells consist of boxy cellulose cell walls lined with membranes. The cell sap inside is up to 95% water. Animal cells consist of soft, baggy cell membranes and a cell sap that is about 65% water. (The difference in cell wall structure, boxy vs. baggy, is why vegetables are generally crisp while meat is soft.) The cell membranes are semipermeable—they let water through, but keep essential dissolved minerals and sugars within the cells.

Osmosis doesn't take place in isolation. It is a water exchange between a cell and its environment. The force and direction of the water exchange is determined by the balance between a cell's interior chemistry and the chemistry of its exterior environment. It is the way this balance is tipped that determines whether water moves into the cell or out of the cell, and how quickly it moves. Salt and sugar are two powerful cooking ingredients that can tip the scales and dramatically change the force and direction of an osmotic exchange.

SALT AND SUGAR TRIGGER OSMOSIS

Take the example of a wilted head of lettuce, which has lost much of its water

through evaporation. The lettuce cells contain a strong solution of lots of natural chemicals concentrated in just a little water. The internal water pressure in the cells, called turgor, is low. A chef soaks the lettuce in fresh water, which is a weak solution containing only trace amounts of chemicals dissolved in lots of water. During osmosis, water is always drawn *from* the weak solution (fresh water) *toward* the strong solution (lettuce cells). The lettuce cells suck in water and plump up, increasing their turgor until they're crisp (see illustration at right).

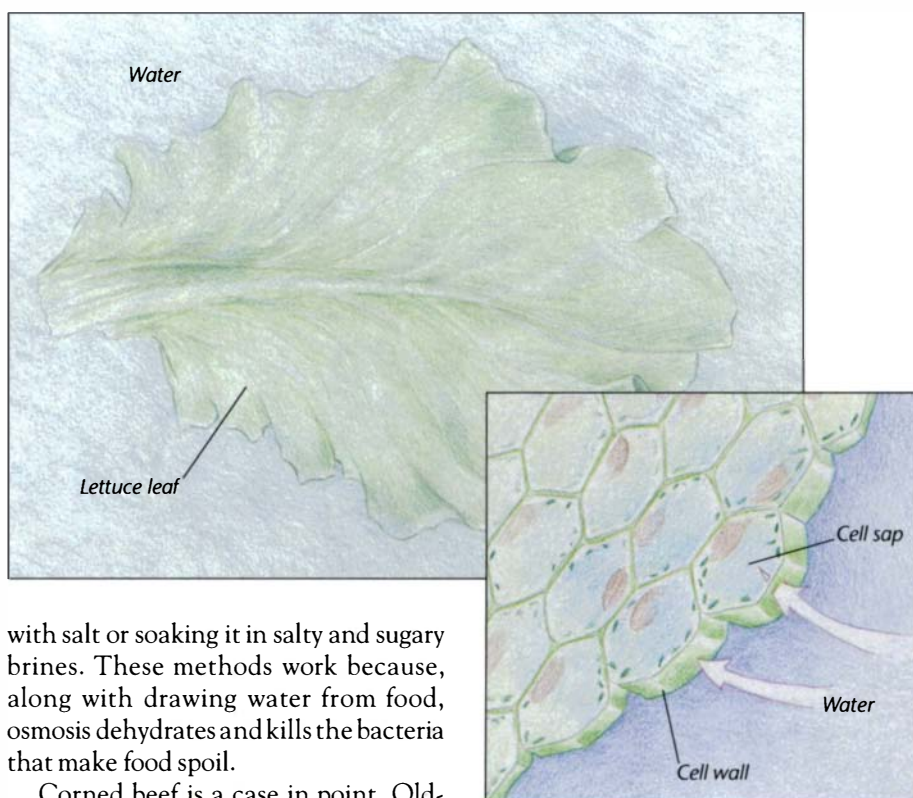
But what happens when the over-eager young sous-chef comes in and decides that adding salt to the soaking water might make the lettuce tastier? He throws a handful of salt into the soaking water, reversing the osmotic balance. Now the salty water is the strong solution with the osmotic "drawing power" and the lettuce cells contain the weak solution. Water is drawn out of the lettuce cells, their turgor drops, the lettuce wilts dramatically. The young sous-chef scrambles for a recipe for lettuce soup, unaware that he has accidentally discovered the miracle of brining.

CURING MEAT BY OSMOSIS

For centuries, people have instinctively harnessed the power of osmosis to keep food from spoiling by covering the food

SCIENCE PROJECT I

Here's an experiment to watch how water flows into a vegetable. Trim a scallion to make a 4-inch piece that's half white and half green. With the tip of a paring knife, make several lengthwise slits in the green part and then soak the scallion in a bowl of fresh water. Water will flow into the scallion's cells through the process of osmosis. Since the rigid leaf structure has been cut in places, as the cells fill with water, the cells near the cuts expand more, causing the leaves to curl. The longer the scallion stays in the water, the more water its cells will absorb and the more the leaves will curl.



with salt or soaking it in salty and sugary brines. These methods work because, along with drawing water from food, osmosis dehydrates and kills the bacteria that make food spoil.

Corned beef is a case in point. Old-time butcher shops closed every weekend. Ice, the only refrigerant available, could not dependably hold fresh meat for two days. To keep unsold meat from going to waste, the butcher soaked the meat in a strong brine or covered it with coarse salt to trigger osmosis. The grains of salt were called “corn” in England, and the name “corned beef” stuck with the

***Wilted lettuce is revived by osmosis.** In wilted lettuce, the water has evaporated, leaving in the cells a strong solution of particles and not much water. When lettuce is soaked, the water (a weak solution) is drawn by osmotic pressure into the lettuce cells, making the lettuce crisp again.*

product, even though any type or cut of meat could be used. Most butchers also added a blend of herbs and spices to the brine. These flavors diffused into the meat during the two-day “floor time.”

Dry sugar and salt cures were also rubbed directly onto the surface of meat or fish, drawing out the water from the top layer of tissue. This moisture was then wiped off or air-dried and more salt rubbed on to draw out more water. Bit by bit, the whole cut of meat or fish dried through osmosis as water migrated to the surface. It could take months to produce a leather-hard country-style ham. In the ham’s inaccessible interior, spoilage near the bone, or “bone souring,” was a constant problem.

The majority of hams for sale now are still cured by osmosis, but only for flavor. Modern hams depend on refrigeration or canning for preservation. Instead of waiting for the slow action of osmosis to work from the outside in, a brine called “pumping pickle” is injected directly

into the main artery of the uncured ham, using the pig’s own circulatory system to carry the curing solution. Through the arteries, the brine penetrates the interior of the ham and triggers osmosis everywhere at once. The residual brine left in the ham after injection-curing is the reason for the “water added” label affixed to most hams. Modern hams taste less salty than hand-rubbed hams because the pumping pickle contains only enough salt to cure for flavor, and not for preservation.

SHOULD YOU SALT MEATS AND VEGETABLES?

Cooks often disagree over the issue of when to salt. This is more than a simple question of seasoning because salt can trigger osmosis. For instance, salting a steak before cooking might seem to be a good idea from a flavoring point of view, but the salt grains will trigger osmosis and draw water to the surface of the meat. If you grill the steak over a high flame, the moisture will evaporate quickly and not make much difference. But if you sauté or fry the meat in a pan, the moisture will result in a gray, steamed surface for the meat, unless you wipe off the moisture before cooking.

Salt or sugar in marinades can also upset the tricky balance of osmosis. A salty or very sweet marinade acts like a brine and draws juices out of the food. If you plan to marinate something overnight but don’t want that much moisture to leach out, consider cutting back on the soy sauce or other salty ingredients in the marinade.

In vegetable cookery, the benefits of cooking in salted boiling water outweigh the slight risk of triggering osmosis. Salt not only flavors the vegetables, but also speeds cooking time. Anyway, when vegetables are cooked in boiling water, they lose their osmotic capabilities. The vegetable’s cellulose cell walls and cell membranes are softened and damaged by the heat and expansion of the boiling water, allowing water to pass through fissures in the cell membranes.

—Rita Sorci Planey, an alumna of Washburne Trade School’s Chef and Meat Cutter programs and formerly a restaurateur in Chicago, is a cooking instructor in Glenview, Illinois. ♦

SCIENCE PROJECT II

This experiment draws water out of a cucumber—and makes a tasty dip, too. Peel and seed a medium cucumber and shred the flesh on a grater. You’ll have about 1 cup. Stir ¼ teaspoon salt into the shredded cucumber to trigger osmosis and put the mixture in a strainer that’s set over a bowl. In 30 minutes, about ½ cup of liquid will have leached out. Press lightly on the shredded cuke to extract more moisture and discard all the juice. Stir in some sour cream or plain yogurt and flavor with fresh chives and dill to make a cucumber dip. Give the flavors time to diffuse—refrigerate the dip for several hours or overnight.

Here's the Beef, But Is It Good?

We've all seen the ads—a thick and juicy filet mignon with a toll-free number for home delivery. I'm a steak lover, and I've always wondered how good these mail-order steaks were, how easy or troublesome the mail-order process would be, and whether the steaks were worth the money. With funds supplied by *Fine Cooking*, but ordering as a regular consumer, I bought steaks from five companies: Boyle Meat Company, Classic Steaks, Great Plains Meats, Omaha Steaks International, and Morton's of Chicago.

I found the first four companies by surveying the ads in current and back issues (including some holiday issues) of five national food and wine magazines.

Fine Cooking was one of them. I included Morton's at the suggestion of *Fine Cooking's* editors, who had received a press release on this newcomer to the mail-order meat field. I tried contacting a sixth company, Covington Ranch Beef, but they didn't return my phone calls in time to be included in the tasting.

Among other cuts of meat, all the companies offered filet mignon, rib-eye steaks, and strip steaks. I decided to try rib-eyes because it's my favorite steak. I ordered the smallest amount I could from each of these companies, and for comparison I also bought USDA Choice-grade steaks locally from a grocery store and from a butcher.

Ordering was simple because all the companies have toll-free numbers. Boyle Meat Company, Great Plains Meats, and Morton's offer rib-eyes in 6- to 10-pound orders. Since I wanted only a small sample, I asked these companies about ordering just four 8-ounce rib-eye steaks to total 2 pounds. Morton's (or rather their supplier, Allen Brothers, Inc.) could not accommodate a special order, so I got their minimum order of six 16-ounce steaks for a total of 6 pounds. Both Boyle Meat Company and Great Plains Meats thoughtfully pointed out that I wouldn't get a good price per pound with a small order, partly because of the shipping and handling costs. I insisted, and Boyle accommodated my request with a price for the special order, while Great Plains Meats adjusted the composition of a combination package (their smallest advertised order size) to include mainly rib-eye steaks.

Classic Steaks and Omaha Steaks International offer a large assortment of steak sizes, order sizes, product combinations, and "specials." Both Omaha and Classic advertise 2-pound orders of four 8-ounce rib-eye steaks. Classic Steaks suggested I buy a larger order, but when I insisted on 2 pounds of rib-eyes, they offered me a deal, taking \$10 (more than 20%) off their advertised price.

All the steaks arrived by UPS or Federal Express within a couple of days of my order. All were frozen, individually vacuum-sealed in plastic, inside a reusable styrene cooler packed with dry ice.

The steaks all looked quite different. The thickest ones—Morton's and Great Plains Meats—were nearly 1½ inches thick. The others were about an inch thick, except for the Classic steak, which was ¾-inch thick. All the frozen steaks were darker than the fresh rib-eyes I bought locally, with a grayish or brownish cast that I found off-putting. Once they were cooked, they looked "normal" to me, and the color had no discernible effect on the flavor. I later learned from a local butcher that the color was natural for flash-frozen, vacuum-packed meat.

While all the meats had the mandatory USDA inspection, only Morton's had an advertised USDA grading—Prime. Grading is intended to be a measure of quality; it's based on many criteria, especially marbling. Marbling is the amount and distrib-

MAIL-ORDER STEAKS

		A Price per pound I paid for a small order of rib-eye steaks (including shipping)	B Price per pound quoted to me for a larger order (including shipping)
Boyle Meat Company 500 E. Third St. Kansas City, MO 64106		800/821-3626	
		\$23.50 (2 lb.)	\$13.17 (6 lb.)
Classic Steaks 4430 S. 110th St. Omaha, NE 68137		800/288-2783	
		\$21.95 (2 lb.)	\$13.58 (8 lb.)
Great Plains Meats PO Box 72 Wisner, NE 68791		800/871-6328	
		\$16.65* (3 lb.)	\$12.30 (10 lb.)
Morton's of Chicago Allen Brothers Inc. 3737 S. Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60609		800/260-0111	
		\$19.83 (6 lb.)	\$19.83 (6 lb.)
Omaha Steaks International 4400 S. 96th St. PO Box 3300 Omaha, NE 68103		800/228-9055	
		\$22.75 (2 lb.)	\$16.00 (6 lb.)
Dallas butcher		\$11.00	\$11.00
Dallas supermarket		\$6.99	\$6.99

* Estimate. Order also included 3 pounds ground beef, for which I deducted \$2 per pound.

Get out your calculator. It isn't always easy to figure out the cost per pound for mail-order beef because it's often promoted in combination packs with an assortment of cuts. Comparing the price per pound between companies is also difficult because there's no standard size or composition of order. On top of that, both Omaha and Classic were quite willing to deal, offering me discounts and "specials" of 10% to 20% off list price. Column A shows what I paid per pound, including shipping, for a small order of rib-eye steaks. I also asked the price for a larger, 6-pound order. Column B shows the price per pound for the nearest size order they would quote me.—D.O.

IF LIFE HANDS YOU A LEMON, MAKE A SOUFFLE.

Sometimes the best way to get ahead is to go back. To school. Our unique, 2 year program offers:

- Hands-on culinary training
- 7 to 1 student/teacher ratio
- Paid, personalized internships
- Financial aid for qualified students
- Advanced Placement available
- A.O.S. degree in Culinary Arts
- NEW: Bachelor's degree program in Service and Management

Send for our
four color
catalog.

NEW ENGLAND CULINARY INSTITUTE

250 Main St., Dept. FC
Montpelier, VT 05602-9720
Telephone (802) 223-6324

Accredited Member, ACCSCT



YOU WON'T FIND THIS GREAT CHARDONNAY ANYWHERE ELSE!

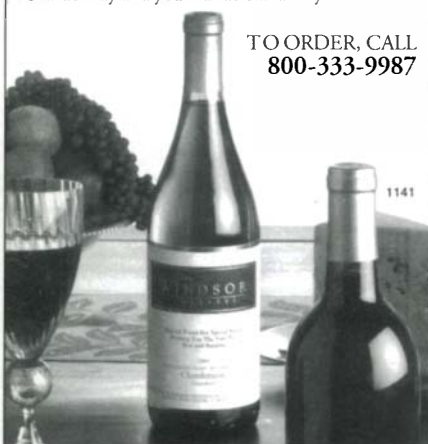
Continuing in Windsor's award-winning tradition, our recently released 1992 Preston Ranch Chardonnay is available exclusively from the winery... for just \$96 a case. Order today and we'll deliver to your home or office. Satisfaction guaranteed.

\$10 INTRODUCTORY OFFER

As an introduction to Windsor's Preston Ranch Chardonnay, order one bottle - one time only - for only \$10.

In 1993, our winemaker received the André Tschelistcheff "Winemaker of the Year" award from *Bon Appetit* magazine. One taste of this classic Chardonnay and you'll understand why.

TO ORDER, CALL
800-333-9987



Real Lean Beef

50% LESS FAT THAN CHICKEN!

COVINGTON RANCH BEEF, a South Dakota Company, introduces a totally trimmed, boneless beef, designed for the low calorie, low fat, low cholesterol diet you want for yourself and your family. Based on a naturally lean and tender breed of cattle, our beef is the most healthful choice in meats, yet lives up to the Midwestern tradition of quality. No fillers or chemicals are ever used in processing.

NOW YOU CAN ENJOY THE SATISFYING TASTE OF REAL BEEF, AGAIN! COMPARE FOR YOURSELF:

6-oz. serving	fat(gm)	% of Cal from Fat	Cholesterol (mg)	Calories
Covington Ranch Tenderloin	3.0	16%	94	168
Flounder	2.6	12%	116	198
Skinless Chicken Breast	6.0	19%	144	280
Ordinary Beef Tenderloin	17.0	43%	142	358

SOURCE: Covington Ranch QA data from USDA approved Green Meadows Laboratory, Ft. Collins, CO and USDA Handbooks 8-5, 8-13, 8-17.

Try the new leader of healthy, lean beef.

COVINGTON RANCH BEEF

P.O. Box 601
YANKTON, SOUTH DAKOTA 57078
CALL AND ORDER TODAY

1-800-365-BEEF

Visa/MC Welcome
Call or Write for a Free Brochure



SALT FREE • SUGAR FREE • ALL NATURAL NO FILLERS • NO MSG • NO PRESERVATIVES

Benson's Gourmet Seasonings brings salt free cooking to new heights in taste. Our unique blends of herbs and spices, from the finest gardens around the world, are outstanding in quality. Give your food a full, more robust flavor the natural way. Treat your taste buds to our exciting blends:

Supreme (110)

Garlic and Herb for poultry/pork/vegetables

Zesty (104)

Lemon Herb for fish/seafood/salads

Calypto (107)

Jamaican hot and spicy

Gusto (106)

Herb and Pepper for baking/broiling/BBQ

Masterpiece (112)

Southwestern for beef/ground meat

Table Tasty (103)

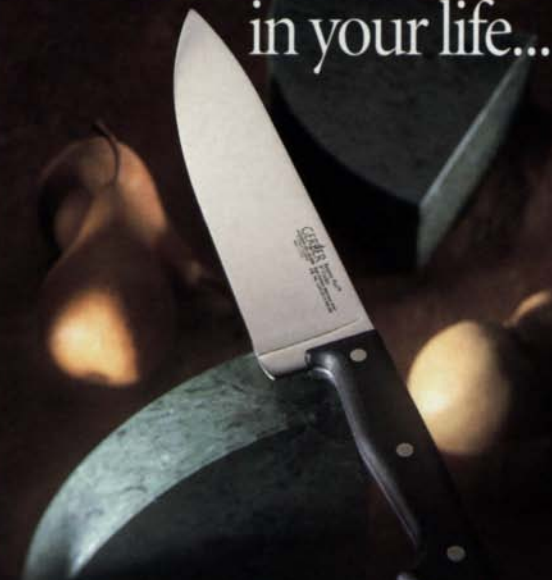
Natural Salty Flavor for the table

Gift Pack Assortment includes Recipe Booklet
Ask about our Sportsmen's Collection



BENSON'S GOURMET SEASONINGS
PO Box 376 • Azusa CA 91702
(800) 325-5619 • fax (818) 969-2912

Put some balance in your life...



Balance Plus by Gerber.

The unique ergonomic designed handles are weighted to correspond to the accompanying blade length, making cutting tasks smoother and easier. Each knife has a high carbon stainless steel blade with a full tang construction, and a handle that will not crack, shrink or warp...ever. This American made quality gives our knives a reputation as being the best value in cutlery.

The Gerber Connection • Fiskars Special Markets • 800-967-5888

ution of intramuscular fat, which can indicate how juicy, flavorful, and tender the meat is likely to be. Prime beef has the most marbling, followed by Choice, Select, and Standard. The other meats didn't have an advertised USDA grade. This grading isn't mandatory; the producer can choose whether to have the USDA grade its meat, and the producer pays the grading costs.

I began by thawing the steaks in the refrigerator overnight. Once defrosted, I grilled them to medium rare, allowed them to rest for 10 minutes, and then lightly salted and peppered them. I identified each steak with color-coded toothpicks and, along with several cooking associates and friends, judged them first on appearance. The thick Morton's and Great Plains steaks looked the most appetizing. I then cut each steak into several pieces, color-coded them, and served some of each steak to the six "judges." We judged the steaks on taste and tenderness. I served at least three sample bites of each steak to compensate

for variations within each piece of beef.

In our view, Morton's topped the list as the tastiest, juiciest, and most tender. In second place was the Great Plains, although it had less visible marbling than Morton's. The meat was very flavorful and quite tender. Tied for third place were the two locally bought Choice-grade steaks. They both had good flavor and were sufficiently tender with a bit of chewiness that was not unpleasant. The Boyle and Omaha steaks did not taste as good to us as the local steaks. While they were tender, they lacked flavor. The rib-eye from Classic tasted both tough and flavorless.

I tried the Morton's steaks again a few nights later. I grilled and served them in the standard steak-and-baked-potato format. Once again I found them excellent. I tried the other brands again another night and compared them to a USDA Choice rib-eye from another local grocery store. The results of these subsequent tastings were consistent with the original test. The Morton's and Great Plains steaks were better than what I could get locally, while

Boyle, Omaha, and Classic were not.

Individually frozen and shipped to my door, the mail-order steaks were convenient to order, store, and serve. To me, the steaks I bought locally, however, were a better value. The Boyle, Classic, and Omaha steaks cost more per pound than the USDA Choice steaks I bought locally (two to three times more since I bought them in small quantities), but I don't think they tasted as good. I did have to go to several supermarkets, however, before I found USDA Choice steaks, because the first markets carried only Select-grade rib-eye. The price and quality of the Great Plains and Morton steaks were what I would expect at a good steakhouse. I would spend my own money on steaks from either of these sources.

—Deborah Orrill is a cooking instructor and consultant in Dallas, Texas, and co-chair of the Dallas chapter of the American Institute of Wine & Food. Orrill received a grand diplôme from La Varenne cooking school in Paris, and directed La Varenne's professional courses in Burgundy. ♦

Love To Cook?

A Brand New Opportunity!

CHEFS
HOMEMAKERS COOKS

Start your own proven and profitable **Home Based Service Business** utilizing your **Creative Cooking** abilities. Learn how to start and operate a successful Personal Chef Service business from the originator and pioneer of the Personal Chef Service industry—the **USPCA**.

Our **Personal Chef Service Business Training System** includes:

- TRAINING MANUAL
- MARKETING MATERIALS
- COMPUTER SOFTWARE
- STARTER RECIPES
- FORMS AND CONTRACTS
- ONE YEAR TELEPHONE SUPPORT

CALL FOR YOUR **FREE** INFORMATION PACKAGE!

1-800-547-7915

UNITED STATES PERSONAL CHEF ASSOCIATION
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Listed in Entrepreneur Magazine's
1993 Business Opportunity Top 500.

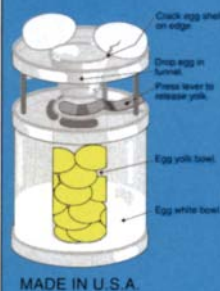
M/C

VISA

EASY TO USE EGG YOLK SEPARATOR

NOW YOU CAN EAT ALL THE EGGS YOU WANT—WITHOUT THE YOLK!

- DO YOU USE EGGS IN YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE?
- DO YOU BAKE?



THIS EGG SEPARATOR IS FOR YOU!
QUICKLY SEPARATES WHITES AND YOLKS
IDEAL FOR BAKING AND MAKING
SOUFFLES, MOUSSES AND MERINGUES
DISASSEMBLES FOR EASY CLEANING
DISHWASHER SAFE

Only \$10.95 plus s/h and sales tax
CALL 1-800-838-YOLK (9655)

Or send payment to: NARROW WAY CO.
P.O. Box 690487, Stockton, CA 95269

Mail Order Gourmet



If you've ever wondered where to find a special food... If you love to read about unusual foods and the people who make them... If you'd like to try the rare ingredients used by outstanding chefs...

You'll want to subscribe to *Mail Order Gourmet*.
A perfect holiday gift for a food loving friend.

\$18 per year for 6 issues.

Call 1-800-989-5996 for information.

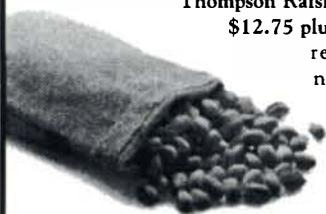
Hilyard & Hilquist of Stanislaus County

America's finest foods,
direct from Stanislaus
County Farms



Another impressive sampling from our
collection of fresh and natural foods.
Raisins about the size of your thumb nail.

So moist and so good they're almost
addictive. 26 oz. of Flame Seedless and
Thompson Raisins - only
\$12.75 plus s/h and
receive our
newsletter.
#2601



For a subscription to the newsletter only send \$5.00.
A \$5.00 credit is given with first purchase.

1-800-933-2672 EXT. 2

Post Office Box 5175 F
Modesto, CA. 95352-5175

The Wines and Cuisine of Tuscany

Mariner Tours invites you to join
our small, escorted group to ex-
plore the classic cuisine and inno-
vative wines of this region. This
opportunity includes:



8 nights at a beautifully restored
15th century farmhouse
Gourmet cooking classes conducted
by the proprietresses of the
Scuola Di Arte Culinaria "Cor-
don Bleu" of Florence
Lectures on Italian wine and wine
tasting, the history and tradition
of cooking, and olive oil
Tours and tastings at premier es-
tates of the region
And much more...



October 12 - 21, 1994
limited to 12 participants

To reserve a space, or for a
brochure, please call today

Mariner Tours 1-617-267-6113



THE CAPTAIN'S Fresh Lobsters



Experience the Taste of Fresh Maine Lobsters

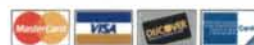
A meal high in protein and low in fat. They are the perfect dish for preparing a special meal with friends or an impromptu cookout on the beach. Packed in Atlantic Seaweed, our Lobsters are delivered to your door and guaranteed for freshness. Give the Captain a call today and experience the taste of fresh Maine Lobsters.

Regular Lobster 1½ lbs. Only \$7.99/lb.*
Select Lobster 2½ lbs. Only \$9.99/lb.*

Our Lobsters are shipped Monday thru Thursday. With each order you'll find a cooking guide and tips on how to use enclosed seaweed to correctly prepare your lobster.

Ordering Hours:

Monday thru Friday
8:30am to 5:30pm
(EST)

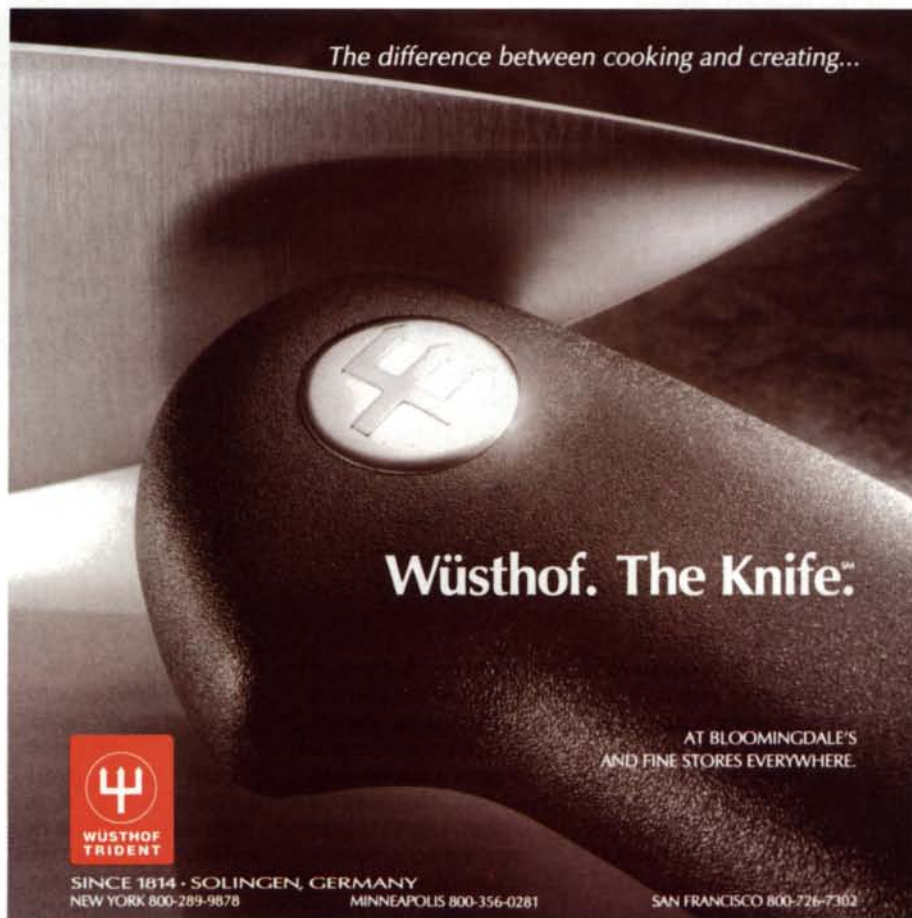


Convenient Ordering Hours, Just Call..

1-800-464-3434

**Plus Shipping and Handling.
Prices good thru September 30, 1994.*

The difference between cooking and creating...



Wüsthof. The Knife.



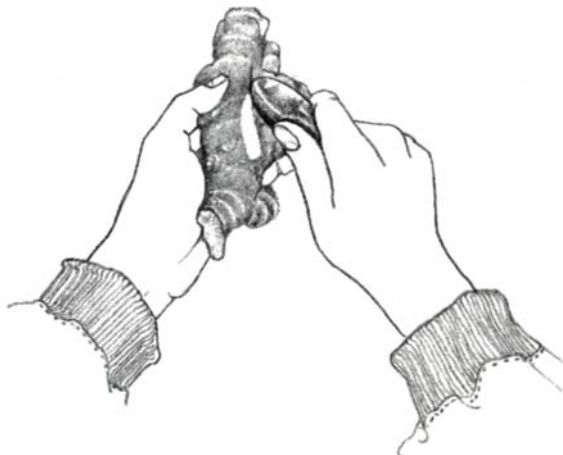
SINCE 1814 • SOLINGEN, GERMANY
NEW YORK 800-289-9878 MINNEAPOLIS 800-356-0281

AT BLOOMINGDALE'S
AND FINE STORES EVERYWHERE.

SAN FRANCISCO 800-726-7302

To share your shortcuts or tricks with fellow readers, write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Enclose a sketch if you like. We pay \$25 to \$50 for tips we publish.

Peeling Ginger



When peeling fresh ginger with a paring knife, some of the usable flesh comes off with the skin, reducing the yield you get from the ginger and raising your food costs. Instead, use a teaspoon to peel the ginger so you don't waste any. Scrape the skin with the edge of the spoon's bowl, applying gentle pressure on the ginger. I like to push the spoon away from me as if I were scraping a carrot, but if it feels more comfortable to you, pull the spoon toward you.

—Walter J. Morrison III,
Buffalo, NY

Paper Plate Spouts

Inexpensive, flexible paper plates have become valuable helpers to me for small chores in my kitchen. I sift flour and other dry ingredients onto them. Then, holding the plate with one hand and folding up the sides, the plate becomes a neat and stable pouring spout. I also use a paper plate as a trough to fill the pepper mill. It works great—the peppercorns don't roll all over the kitchen.

—Evelyn M. Brown,
Norfolk, VA

Adding Potato Water to Gravy

When I make mashed potatoes and gravy, I often save a cup or so of the water in which the potatoes were boiled and add it to the drippings to make gravy. The potato water adds nutrients, flavor, and starch, which helps to thicken the gravy.

—Tammy Hines-Dumitru,
Norwalk, CT

Frozen Bread Revived

To make a loaf of frozen unsliced bread seem almost fresh-baked, I dip the frozen loaf quickly in water and put it in a 350°F oven directly on the oven rack. In 15 or 20 minutes, the bread will be barely heated through and will taste fresh and chewy. I stick a wooden cake tester into the loaf to make sure the bread isn't still frozen. The reborn loaf should be eaten in a day or so, but another dunking and heating will help salvage the remainder of the loaf. I even dip-and-bake loaves that have never seen the freezer if they don't seem quite fresh or if their crusts need a little extra crunch.

—Joanne Richards,
Portland, OR

Removing Garlic Odor from Hands

After chopping garlic, I run cold water over my fingers as I rub them on the flat of a stainless-steel knife (if a knife blade seems too risky, a large stainless-steel spoon works, too). The important factors seem to be cold water and stainless steel. A 30-second bath takes the garlic odor away.

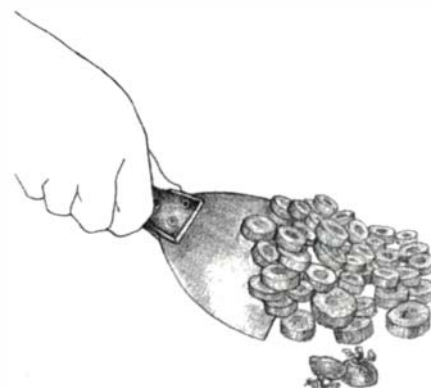
—Jim DeMase, Greenwich, CT

Carrot Sweetens Tomato Sauce

Regardless of the recipe, I always add a fresh carrot or two to tomato-based sauces to counteract the acidity of the tomatoes and to add a sweet taste and aroma. I cut the carrots into one-inch chunks, cook the chunks in the sauce, and then purée everything together.

—Patrizia Makohan,
Bloomfield Hills, MI

Shoveling Chopped Veggies



For years of cooking just for me, I used the flat of my chef's knife or cleaver to transfer chopped vegetables from the cutting board to the pan on the stove. Since I got married and started cooking for two (or more if we have company), the flat blades aren't large enough and I started dropping lots of chopped veggies on the floor with annoying regularity.

For a while I tried using a pastry scraper as I had seen on Graham Kerr's show, but it was also too small. While having part of the house rehabbed, I discovered the right tool for the job. I watched a drywaller pick up spilled nails by using a six-inch drywall knife, known as a "taping knife," as a shovel. I went to the hardware store and found my own for \$7. It has a comfortable handle, flexible steel blade, and is washable. It's large enough for five chopped carrots.

I get odd looks from guests in my kitchen, but they know me and understand. My main problem is keeping my wife from using it for patching the walls as we rehab the rest of the house.

—Mark Beard-Witherup,
Chicago, IL

Roasting Coffee in a Popcorn Popper

You don't need an expensive coffee-roasting machine to roast green coffee beans at home. An electric hot-air popcorn popper does a great job. Hot air circulates through vents in the bottom of the popper and puts a spin on the beans, ensuring even roasting. I use a

Are your knives giving you the chef's edge?

Whether you're a professional chef or a home gourmet, you know that a quality knife makes a world of difference. And nothing defines quality quite like Ludwig Schiff, of Solingen, Germany. To make the point, here are some great restaurants that use Ludwig Schiff knives every day...

Le Cirque	The 21 Club
Lutece	The Water Club
The Plaza	The Waldorf-Astoria


3 1/2" PARING KNIFE \$21.95

4 1/2" UTILITY KNIFE \$21.95 (not shown)


6" BONING KNIFE \$22.95

8" FILLET KNIFE \$29.95 (not shown)



7" OFFSET KNIFE \$34.95

10" OFFSET KNIFE \$39.95 (not shown)


10" SERRATED CHEF'S \$39.95


10" SLICER \$44.95

12" HOLLOW GROUND SLICER \$39.95 (not shown)


10" CHEF'S KNIFE \$59.95
8" CHEF'S KNIFE \$53.95 (not shown)
10" SHARPENING STEEL \$22.95 (not shown)

Order your Ludwig Schiff knives today. Call 800-FLASH-21 Toll-Free or Fax Order to 516-422-2358.


FLASH IN THE PAN

Where quality meets the discriminating shopper.

95 East Main St., Babylon, NY 11702

World Renown Excellence

Discover the opportunities,
Share in the tradition.

Le Cordon Bleu Paris
Cooking School



Ecole de Cuisine
et de Pâtisserie Française

All courses taught by
Professional French Chefs.

-Basic and Intermediate Cuisine
-Basic and Advanced Pastry

*All leading towards
LE GRAND DIPLOME

Intensive courses,
Demonstration Workshops and
evening classes available.

For more information, please call or write:

Le Cordon Bleu Paris Cooking School
Suite 400, 1390 Prince of Wales Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2C3N6
(613) 224-8603 FAX (613) 224-9966

AMERICA

State by State

The Catalog for Gourmet Enthusiasts

Presents from GEORGIA, home of
The Blue Ridge Mountains and
"sweet" Vidalia Onions.

Vidalia Onion Barbecue Sauce,
Mustard, Relish & Salad Dressing.

A Quartet of Gourmet Condiments
with the graceful flavor of
Vidalia Onions.

*Add Some Southern Flavor
to your Summer Barbecue!*



ORDER NOW
AND RECEIVE A FREE LOGO APRON
(800) 706-4438

Call today for a Free Catalog and find out
about dozens of delicacies from 24 states!

DON ALFONSO

THE LARGEST ASSORTMENT OF CHILES IN THE U.S.!

PHONE 1.800.456.6100
P.O. BOX 201988 AUSTIN, TEXAS 78720-1988

FAX 1.800.765.7373

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN INGREDIENTS AND UTENSILS!



Monsieur
TENDER-IZE-EUR®



THE FAST AND EASY
TO USE ... MEAT
TENDERIZING DEVICE

(Mister TENDERIZER)

- No Splattering
No Chemicals
- Tenderizes All Cuts
of Meats in seconds
- USDA/FDA Materials
- Dishwasher Safe
- Only \$24.95 (+Post.)

Call now !!!
1-800-736-0990

Wearever popper that I picked up at a secondhand store for \$5.

I put two tablespoons of unroasted beans in the popper (the plastic top that directs the popcorn into a bowl isn't needed, so I leave it off). I turn on the machine and time the roast cycle. Six minutes makes a light to medium roast, seven minutes a regular roast, and eight minutes a dark roast. The beans spin and toast up, crackling and popping as they roast. The popper blows out messy chaff from the beans, so you may want to do your roasting on the back porch or in the sink.

For a perfect roast, cool the beans down quickly after roasting. I dump my beans into a plastic or metal colander and shake the colander until the beans are cooled. Then I pop a few beans in my mouth and chew them. This is the only way to really tell what qualities the coffee will have—acidity, smokiness, etc.

Although I've occasionally ground the roasted beans almost immediately, I get better results if the beans rest for about 30 minutes after roasting before I grind them. It seems to result in a more aromatic quality—perhaps some of the oils migrate or recombine during the resting process. You will now have about four tablespoons of coffee, which is about right for a couple of cups of espresso or one serving in a drip coffeemaker.

—Jay Francis, Houston, TX

Freezing Tomato Paste

In order not to waste leftover canned tomato paste, open the other end of the can and use the lid to push the contents into a zippered plastic bag. Store the bag in the freezer and simply break off a chunk of tomato paste whenever you need it.

—Esther Whitby, Bloomington, IN

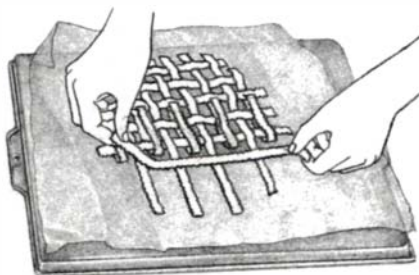
Glossy Icing

To smooth bumpy icing (but not icing that actually has lumps in it) after a cake has been iced, pass a blow dryer on low heat over the surface until the bumps disappear.

—Neil Hendricks, Albuquerque, NM

Handling Pastry Lattice

Butter-based pastry dough becomes firmer when chilled, and I take advantage of this fact to make a neat woven lattice top for fruit pies and tarts. Instead of weaving soft, room-temperature pastry strips on top of the pie and ending up with uneven weaving and juice-coated pastry, I prepare the lattice on a baking sheet or cutting board covered with a sheet of waxed paper.



First, I roll out the circle of dough (on another surface) about 1/8 inch thick and large enough for the top of the pie, and then I cut the dough into 1/2-inch strips. I weave the strips together on the waxed paper, making sure the lattice will be wide enough for the pie or tart. I put the baking sheet or cutting board with the lattice in the refrigerator for 30 to 45 minutes, until the dough is firm



enough to lift. After filling the pie or tart shell, I remove the baking sheet from the refrigerator and carefully slide the lattice off the waxed paper and place it on top of the filled shell (sometimes the lattice is firm enough to simply lift up and place on top of the shell). I wait five to ten minutes for the lattice to soften, and then I press down on the strips to seal them to the bottom crust and flute the edge.

—Mary Jane Kaloustian, Northville, MI

Preserving Fresh Herbs

When fresh herbs are abundant, gather the leaves, wash and dry them, and then purée them in a food processor or blender with fresh garlic and a little extra-virgin olive oil. Fill recycled two- and four-ounce baby-food jars with the mixture and put the jars on the narrow shelves of the freezer door.

When fresh herbs are out of season, these small portions are perfect for flavoring sauces, soups, casseroles, and marinades; for topping meat, poultry, and fish dishes before baking; for filling mushroom caps; and for adding to salad dressings and simple vinaigrettes. In the last four years, I've enjoyed adding a variety of fresh goodness to my cooking in all seasons.

—Olive Curtis, Acme, WA

Baking Dough on Parchment

For a crispy crust, I like baking bread and pizza on a baking stone. I used to put cornmeal on the stone to keep the dough from sticking, but my children don't like the taste of cornmeal, and I don't like the mess cornmeal makes in and out of the oven. Now I put a piece of kitchen parchment on a wooden peel or on the back of a baking sheet and put the shaped bread dough or rolled pizza dough on top. While it's rising, I cut away most of the excess parchment with scissors to keep it from burning or interfering with other loaves on the baking stone. When the dough is ready for baking, I slide the dough, along with parchment, directly onto the baking stone. Sometimes I remove the parchment halfway through cooking to make a slightly browner bottom crust, but more often, I leave it in place for the duration of baking.

—Deborah Patterson, Atlanta, GA

Keeping Leftover Cake Moist

If you have leftover cake, put it in a container or in foil wrapping with an apple. The fruit will keep the cake moist and flavorful.

—Faye Field, Longview, TX ♦

“Butter Makes Almost Every Food Taste Better.”

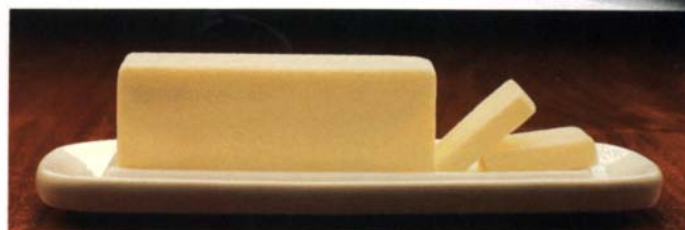
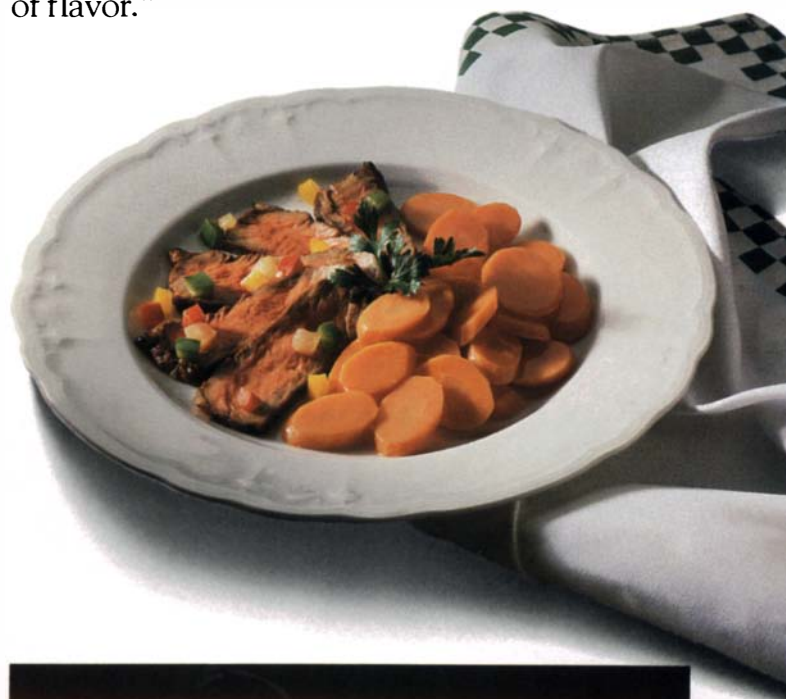
Chef David Burke, Park Avenue Cafe, NYC



“That’s what makes it so wonderful.

Butter can turn boiled carrots into delicious glazed carrots. Here’s how I do it. I boil and drain fresh carrots, sauté them with a little of the cooking water, then stir in a few pats of butter. They taste great. Try it yourself at home. It’s easy.

If you love preparing delicious food, remember this tip: a little butter adds a lot of flavor.”



NOTHING BRINGS OUT THE TASTE LIKE
B U T T E R



To get the most out of grilling vegetables, organize your outdoor workspace. You can enjoy the sun and keep an eye on the grill. All the ingredients Sinnes will need for the ratatouille are on the table.

Ratatouille on the Grill

Grilling the vegetables enlivens a traditional Mediterranean dish

BY A. CORT SINNES

As good as ratatouille is when it's cooked on top of the stove or baked in an earthenware pot, it just doesn't compare to the taste of ratatouille grilled over live coals. Imagine a mix of whatever fresh summer vegetables you have on hand, combined with the rustic, slightly smoky taste imparted by the coals. It's one of those great flavor combinations that goes straight to the heart of good eating.

Save for the occasional ear of corn, most American home cooks are surprisingly reluctant to grill vegetables over coals. By learning to make ratatouille on the grill, you'll learn how to grill at least five different vegetables in one shot. In the future, whether you grill them singly or in concert is up to you. But I'll bet my first ripe tomato that once you've tried any grilled vegetable, you'll be back for more.

A dish from the French region of Provence, ratatouille is a combination of cooked vegetables—traditionally tomatoes, zucchini, and eggplant—well seasoned with garlic and herbs. There are a number of acceptable cooking methods, so ratatouille is best described as a dish rather than as a “recipe.” This is especially true when it comes to making ratatouille on the grill.

The ingredients I suggest are those that appear in traditional versions of ratatouille. However, if you want to add mushrooms, add mushrooms. If you want a lot of bell peppers and squash, but very little eggplant, so be it. No matter the particular ingredients, or the exact proportions, ratatouille will have the taste of summer sunshine and the aromatic blessing of the grill.

The procedure I describe has all the guidelines you'll need, but lacks specific temperatures, measurements, and amounts. This is intentional. Like appreciating the outdoors itself, cooking vegetables on the grill is best done with all senses engaged. How

much garlic and olive oil do you like? Taste. Are the vegetables soft enough? Touch. Are they getting good grill marks, or burning? See and smell.

Start by lighting the charcoal (about 60 briquettes or an equal amount of lump charcoal). Gather your skewers. If you're using bamboo skewers, soak them in warm water for 20 minutes to keep them from burning on the grill.

Prepare the vegetables as follows:

Onions—Peel, cut off the ends, and cut into six even wedges. Try to keep the wedges intact, as this makes for easier skewering.

Squash—For zucchini and crookneck varieties, slice into $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick rounds. For small squashes, such as the pattypan variety, slice off the ends and cut into six even wedges.

Bell peppers—Core, seed, and cut into 1-inch squares. Use any colors you like, but note that exotic (and expensive) purple peppers turn a normal green when heated.

Eggplant—Peel (optional, but the skin can get a little tough in the grilling process) and cut into 1-inch cubes.

Tomatoes—Large beefsteak tomatoes can be grilled whole, or cut in half horizontally. In either case, there's no need to put beefsteak tomatoes on skewers. Roma, pear, and cherry tomatoes can be skewered.

Once the vegetables have been prepared, thread each type on the skewers, packing the pieces as densely as possible. Never mix-and-match the vegetables; each has its own cooking time, and combining different types on one skewer confuses the issue, not to mention the cook. Brush the skewered vegetables in olive oil (or roll them in it) and put them on a large platter. Admire.

Approximately 30 minutes after lighting the charcoal (about the same time it takes to prepare the vegetables), the coals should be completely covered with a light gray ash, just right for grilling.

Bring out the platterful of vegetables, along with the following: a pair of long-handled tongs, a bottle of your best olive oil, salt, a pepper mill, a head of garlic, a bunch of fresh basil or parsley (or both), a nice bowl to hold the cooked vegetables (one that will do the finished product justice), a wooden spoon, a small cutting board, and a sharp knife. If you're of a mind for it, don't forget a glass of wine for the cook.

Push the coals to one side of the grill. Why? Be-

cause (and here's where I disagree with many outdoor chefs) indirect cooking allows you the maximum flexibility with cooking times, keeps heat off the cook, and provides the least opportunity for charring the vegetables. To my taste, vegetables are not made to be charred.

For the record, here's how long the vegetables will take to cook—not in exact minutes, but in order of longest cooking time to least: onions; squash; peppers; mushrooms (if you choose to include them); eggplant; and tomatoes.

The procedure for grilling the vegetables is a little like orchestrating a ballroom dancing contest. It isn't particularly difficult, but you have to keep your eye on what's where and how well it's doing.

I put the longest-to-cook vegetables (onions and squash) nearest the fire, but not directly over it. If you run out of room on the grill, you can double-decker the skewers. The top layer will receive at least second-



For even cooking, grill only one type of vegetable per skewer. Here, zucchini and green peppers sit on the center of the grill, receiving indirect heat from the white-hot coals that have been scraped to one side.

Perfectly grilled eggplant chunks will be browned and slightly wilted from the heat, but have only a few scattered char markings. Too much charring would mask the flavor of the vegetables.



To avoid burned fingers, use tongs to gently push the vegetables off each skewer. Add them to the marinade while they're warm so they soak up lots of flavor.



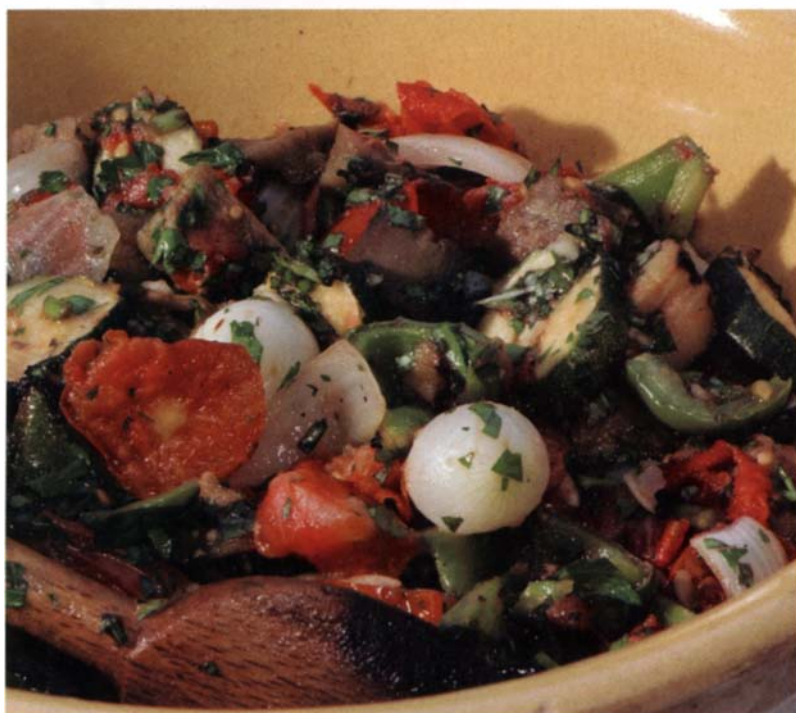


Skewer small tomatoes; place large ones right on the grill.

Slipping two skewers through small varieties, like these Romas, keeps them from spinning on the skewer. Large tomatoes, like these beefsteaks, should be cored. The heat of the grill will split the skins of all tomatoes.

The author's grilled ratatouille displays the distinct shapes and jewel tones of all the vegetables.

Use a wooden spoon to gently combine the vegetables, herbs, and marinade. The vegetables taste great at room temperature, and the cooling time gives the flavors a chance to meld.



hand benefits of the grill, which is better than none.

If you have a covered kettle type of grill, so much the better. Mine is a covered grill, and I cook the vegetables with the lid in place. It isn't necessary, but it does speed the cooking time. Keep the top and bottom vents completely open so that oxygen feeds the burning coals.

After you have the first batch of vegetables in position on the grill, pour a healthy soupçon of olive oil into the ratatouille bowl and add as much pressed or chopped fresh garlic as you desire. (If you're grilling sixteen vegetable skewers, I wouldn't consider six to eight cloves indecent.) Mix slightly with the wooden spoon.

Just as each group of vegetables starts to achieve "doneness," move it directly over the fire and watch it like a hawk; this is when the vegetables can burn

in an instant. Sure, you want those nice grill marks with the attendant flavors of fire, smoke, and caramelized sugars—but please, don't let them burn. You'll be much happier with the final product if you pay strict attention to the skewers when they're in this final stage of grilling.

As one group of vegetables gets done, keep moving the others closer to the fire until, at the very end, just before they're done, they're positioned directly over the coals for those final telltale grill marks. As each group is done, push them off the skewers into the bowl and mix them with the olive oil and garlic.

If you've arranged the vegetables over the fire from the least to the longest amount of cooking time, the tomatoes will be the last to come off the grill. In all honesty, by the time the eggplant is done, some toma-

atoes will be so soft that they can't handle one more move, let alone being seated directly over the coals, so the final phase of grilling is optional for tomatoes. If the tomatoes are large, or still whole, put them on the platter until they're cool enough to handle and cut them into large chunks before scooping them into the bowl.

Finally, chop the basil or parsley (or both) fine and add it to the mixture in the bowl. Add plenty of salt and pepper. This should be done to taste, but don't skimp on the salt. It plays an important role in accentuating the flavors of the ratatouille, especially if it will be served at room temperature or cold. Capers also make an excellent salty addition.

The dish improves if left to sit for any length of time; this allows flavors to "marry." The ratatouille can be served hot, cold, or (my preference) room temperature. The dish makes a great partner to grilled meat, or it can be tossed with feta or pasta, or both, to create a vegetarian main course. Lightly chill a good-quality dry rosé (such as a French Tavel) or a fruity Beaujolais Villages for an excellent wine pairing with your grilled ratatouille.

If there are any leftovers, you'd better get to the refrigerator early. The line forms at the left.

A. Cort Sinnes is a nationally syndicated columnist and the award-winning author of more than 20 books on outdoor living, including *The Grilling Encyclopedia* (Grove Atlantic), which was nominated for a James Beard Award last year. He makes his home (and garden) in St. Helena, California. ♦



Buying Top-Notch Fish

Seattle seafood expert
tells how to choose
the best-quality fish

BY JON ROWLEY

In fish cookery, shopping skills are more important than recipes and equipment. You can't create a delicious fish dish from poor-quality fish. While it takes years to acquire a sushi chef's mastery of fish buying, anyone with a keen interest in cooking with fish can quickly become an expert fish shopper by learning to instantly recognize a brilliant piece of fish. I'm happy to share what I've learned in more than 25 years of catching, cooking, and eating fish, as well as teaching chefs and others about fish.

FRESH VS. GOOD

As a former commercial fisherman in Alaska, and as a lifelong student of how fish harvesting and handling affects taste, I can tell you that freshness is only one aspect of good-quality fish. In fact, fish can be too fresh, but I'll say more on that later. A fish that's fresh isn't necessarily better than a frozen fish. Legally, "fresh" only means that the fish hasn't been frozen; the term doesn't refer to how old the fish is. The best-quality frozen fish can be virtually indistinguishable from the best fresh fish. In fact, much of the fish at sushi counters has been frozen using state-of-the-art techniques.

In Japan, high quality is an article of faith, especially when it comes to fish. In fact, the Japanese have a word—*umami*—that expresses an almost mystical appreciation of quality. I first learned of *umami* from Shiro Kashiba, a friend, teacher, and now retired Seattle sushi master. Not speaking Japanese, I diligently pursued the meaning of this practically untranslatable word for years, illuminating my understanding of qual-

This fish says "take me home—I'm delicious." Firm flesh, clear eyes, sweet smell, bright gills, and a reflective slime are all indicators of good quality, which means great eating.

ity in fish and other foods in the process. Now in my consulting business, I use the concept of *umami* to teach chefs and others about fish quality.

A fish has *umami* when it is all that it can become at its peak of quality, because it was caught during its peak season, handled by skilled fishermen, stored under perfect conditions, and sold when perfectly fresh.

SENSING PERFECT QUALITY IN FISH

A great fish, one with *umami*, has an immediate and compelling appeal to the senses, a glistening, luminous quality, a take-me-home-I'm-delicious look that catches the eye of passersby.

The whole fish has all of its scales intact, a sign of proper handling from the fisherman on. (Some fish, however, don't have scales, such as swordfish and shark.) Very fresh fish that has been held at the right temperature, preferably in ice, has a bright, reflective slime, resembling a chef's aspic that hasn't quite set (see photo on p. 25). This slime protects the fish from bacteria. The eyes of a good-quality fish are clear and bright, and the gills, if still in the fish, are a vivid red or pink and are free of mucous. If a fish has been bled, however, the gills will have lost their bright color.

Good fish are firm and resilient to the touch and their smell is clean, fresh, almost sweet. Never buy a fish that smells like a fish. If possible, smell the gill and stomach cavity before buying; odors start there.

Once a fish is cut into fillets or steaks, *umami* is difficult to maintain because deterioration through bacterial growth and moisture loss accelerates. A fish market that cuts its own fish is the best bet for finding the best-quality fillets and steaks.

As with whole fish, the flesh of fillets and steaks cut from good-quality fish will have a bright, appetizing aspect, a clear unmistakable translucent hue that's referred to as "bloom" in the seafood industry. The flesh from a fish that has been bled while alive will be exceptionally clear. The difference between bled and unbled fish is like night and day. Unfortunately, there are few fishermen in this country who bleed their fish and few buyers who appreciate the difference (see the box at right).

Sharp knives and expert knifework give fillets and steaks a good appearance. Uneven or jagged cutting will show up in the finished dish. When cutting steaks, there is an optimum thickness for each species that takes advantage of the distinctive texture and grain, or lay, of the flesh. As a rule, fish steaks are cut between one-half and one inch thick, depending on the size of the species. A "shingle cut" is a steak that's thicker on one side than on the other—not good. Steaks should be cut evenly so they cook evenly, and each steak should be the same thickness.

THE EVIDENCE OF POOR QUALITY

Now that we can easily recognize a fish of perfect



quality—a fish with *umami*—by appearance, feel, and smell, let's go over a few of the signs that can quickly tell you that the quality of a fish is on a downhill slide.

All very fresh fish have clear eyes, but clear eyes are not always an accurate gauge for freshness. Salmon, for instance, have small, dense eyes that look perfectly fine when the fish is well past its prime. By the time the eyes of a salmon go cloudy, the fish is best used for fertilizer.

With other fish, such as the quillback rockfish favored by the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest, eyes are excellent freshness indicators. Two days after harvest, the quillback's eyes begin to get cloudy.

The eyes are only one quality indicator, to be used in conjunction with others, such as gill color and flesh color. In a fresh fish, the gills should be a vibrant red or pink, though if the fish has been bled, the gills will be pale. Brownish or grayish gills are a sign of age. Because removing the gills provides less area for bacterial growth, many fish markets sell fish without gills, and sometimes without heads, so you won't always have gills as a reference. Missing scales are also a sign of mishandling or old age.

Bruised fish, which display an unnatural redness on the exterior or in the fillets and steaks, will have an off flavor, will spoil quickly, and are best avoided (see top photo on p. 28). Bruising is caused by mishandling while the fish is alive. The fish receives a blow, blood vessels break, and blood moves out into the meat. The same blow received after death will cause softness of texture, but will no longer cause redness.

Some fish that are naturally white-fleshed, like cod or Pacific rockfish, may have a pink or red hue, sometimes subtle, uniformly distributed throughout. This uniform discoloration is a kind of bruising and is caused by one of two things, or both. If the fish are

Sushi chefs select only the best fish—and sometimes that means frozen.

The Japanese have a reverence for excellent ingredients, especially when it comes to seafood. Only perfect specimens make it to the sushi counter, but perfect doesn't mean "never frozen." When fish is frozen correctly, the quality can remain high, but freezing right is a job for the pros.

Quality starts on the fishing boat

How a fish is harvested and how a fish dies have a great deal to do with how a fish will taste. When a fish is subjected to acute trauma in trawls and gill nets, lactic acid builds up in its flesh and affects flavor adversely. However, both of these fishing-gear types, when operated by skilled fishermen, can produce good-quality fish. The longer the nets are in the water, the poorer the quality. Quality-minded fishermen make short tows, or “soaks” in the case of gill nets, and bring fish aboard alive with a minimum of trauma and bruising.

Line-caught, and in some cases trap-caught, fish has deservedly

Good eating starts with a conscientious fisherman. Here, the fisherman hauls aboard a halibut that's still alive. He can kill the fish properly and prepare it so its quality doesn't degrade while at sea.

earned a good reputation. Each fish is brought on board alive and dealt with individually. Ideally, the fish is immediately stunned, bled (an artery near the throat latch is severed), and eviscerated (the entrails are removed), before the onset of rigor mortis.

This is proper fish handling. To do it right, the fish should be bled, gutted, and iced before it goes into rigor mortis. A slow, cold passage through this phase preserves good texture and develops the best flavor.

FISH CAN BE TOO FRESH

The next important step is to get the fish into ice before rigor mortis sets in, because controlling rigor mortis is critical to controlling appearance, texture, mouth-feel, flavor, and shelf life. Despite the advice typically found in cookbooks to buy the freshest fish you can, fish actually may be much better eaten a few days—sometimes several days—after it has been caught. In fact, eating a fish right out of the water can be downright awful, as many sport fishermen can attest. Flavorful, moist, succulent fish depends on a fish being properly chilled before the onset of rigor mortis, preferably with ice. A fish that goes through rigor mortis in ambient temperature—on a riverbank or on the deck of a boat—goes through rigor very quickly. During this process, tiny filaments of flesh rip and tear. After rigor, when the fish is cooked, it will be soft in texture and bland in flavor, even with fish less than a day out of the water.

Cold temperatures slow the rigor mortis process so the flesh retains its integrity; the slower process also

allows the formation of the chemical inosine monophosphate (IMP), which is the chief positive flavor component in fish flesh. The rigor mortis process can take from a few hours to a week, depending on the species, air and water temperature, and whether or not the fish was refrigerated before rigor. The amount of IMP peaks just after the fish passes through rigor mortis, making that the best time to eat a fish. When cooked, it will be the most flavorful, moist, and succulent piece of fish you can imagine. This fish also has a very positive mouth-feel—a fullness of flavor—that goes beyond taste and texture.

So what about the live fish tanks in Chinese fish markets and restaurants? Fish killed and cooked directly from live tanks are either a touch grainy and mushy or hopelessly knotted and chewy. One thing a live fish tank gives you the opportunity to do is to control the rigor mortis in an ideal manner, if you have the time and space to store the fish in ice for several days at home.—J.R.

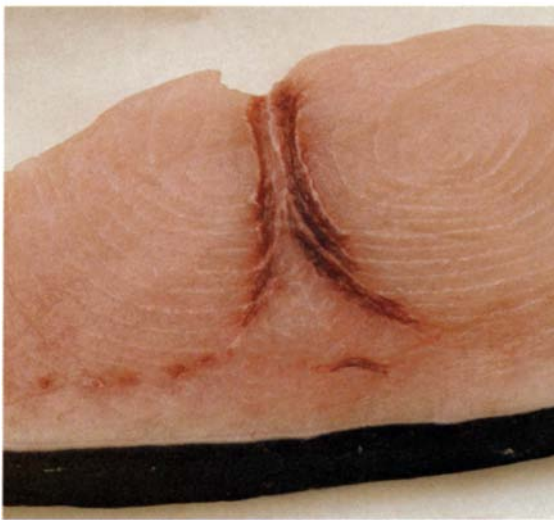
towed around in the back end of a trawl net, they are literally crushed alive. The same thing happens when fish are transferred alive from the trawl to the fish hold. The fish on the bottom of the hold will be pink or red hued. This condition is fairly common with flounder and sole, most of which are taken by trawl. Again, this kind of bruising will give the fish an off flavor and will hurry along the spoilage.

Some fish have prominent red marks in their flesh that are not a result of bruising, but are their natural circulatory system markings. Look for these circulatory markings in swordfish, shark, and mahi mahi. Similar colored symmetrical markings may be found in many fish in the layer of fatty flesh next to the skin. In both these cases, the pigments should be vivid red or pink, depending on the species, but never brownish red. These areas brown with age.

As fillets and steaks begin to age, the translucence of the flesh turns opaque and the outward aspect turns from bright to flat and dull. A slippery feel and a shiny but otherwise dull and opaque aspect probably means the fish has been treated with sodium tripolyphosphate (STP) or a similar product. Used to retard bacterial growth as well as driploss (see below), these additives can be somewhat effective in suppressing a fishy odor. The chemicals are approved by the Food and Drug Administration, with the proviso that consumers be informed of their use. Fish processors commonly treat fillets with these additives, but they rarely inform their customers. These products also add a chemical taste to the fish. If the quality of the fish is excellent to begin with, there's no need to use STP or any other additive.

Driploss, the amount of liquid that seeps from the fish, is also a sign of age and consequently of departed *umami*. Driploss results from a progressive collapse of cell walls and a breakdown of tissue caused by proliferation of bacteria. Driploss is nonexistent or negligible in very fresh, well-handled fish. Once weight loss through driploss has begun, the fish will lose even more liquid during cooking. The resulting texture is dry and the flavor bland. The fish's natural moistness and flavor, or what is left, will be at the bottom of the cooking pan, not on your plate. Fish that are losing liquid will also have lost their firmness and resiliency.

When buying a whole fish, always smell the gill and stomach cavity before purchase. The fish odor that comes with age starts here. Odor is the most reliable indicator that a fish's quality is in decline. (Some freshwater fish, like smallmouth bass, will have a distinct odor when taken right from the water, but that smell is different from the characteristic "fishy" odor of old fish.) Odor, dull or bruised appearance, driploss, and soft texture all hold hands going down the slide of declining quality.



Look out for uneven red blotches in the flesh—they're usually bruises caused by crushing or other mishandling of the fish. Bruising can give the fish an off flavor and will make it spoil faster.

These red marks are good. Some fish, like the swordfish at left, have prominent, symmetrical red markings, which are not bruises but rather are part of their circulatory systems. These markings should be bright red or pink, but never brown, which would mean the fish is old.

PROFILE OF A GOOD FISH MARKET

Now that we can spot great fish and know where quality comes from, let's find a fish market. This checklist will help you make your selection:

- Does the market do a brisk business? The busier the better.
- Is it free of fishy odors? Avoid fish markets that smell like fish.
- Is the market antiseptically clean and well maintained? Is the glass in the fish case spotless? Is the stainless clean and polished?
- Is the labeling general ("salmon") or precise ("sockeye salmon steaks")? Is the labeling correct ("pollack" as opposed to "blue cod")?
- Is the seafood arranged in a display that's attractive yet designed for efficient sales?
- Is fin fish displayed separately from shellfish? (This is important in preventing bacterial contamination.)
- Is the knifework on the cut fish clean and precise?
- Are whole fish well iced?
- Is the ice clean and white, showing that it's changed regularly?
- Does the market cut its own fish?
- Is the staff knowledgeable about the products

they're selling? Do they make good culinary recommendations?

If the answers to most of these questions is "yes," you're most likely in a well-run market that cares about selling good-quality fish.

Are supermarkets okay? For years, the number one rule in shopping for fish was "never buy fish in a supermarket." However, many supermarkets, even in the middle of the country, have worked hard to develop credible fish counters. If a supermarket's fish department is managed by the meat department, the likelihood of a good-quality fish program is low. But if a store has a separate fish department managed and staffed by professional fish people, it can be every bit as good as or better than an independent fish market.

Don't be put off by plastic-wrapped self-service fish. The fish in a tray pack is handled less than the loose fish behind the counter, and it's likely to receive better temperature control. If the quality of the fish going into the tray pack is first-rate to begin with, plastic-wrapped, tray-pack fish can be just as good as, if not better than, fish purchased at a service counter. The only thing missing from the self-service fish department is someone to answer questions.

Cultivate your fishmonger. Having a good personal relationship with your fishmonger will improve

your fish dishes as much as your own knowledge of fish will. Communicate your quality standards, and look for unobtrusive ways to demonstrate your knowledge. A good fishmonger respects a knowledgeable customer. Call ahead with special orders and requirements. Have the market call you if a particularly brilliant piece of fish comes in. As long as there isn't a line of customers waiting, ask questions and share your knowledge and recipes with your fishmonger. Compliment nice counter displays and beautiful fish. Never accept a product that doesn't meet your standards. Provide feedback, good and bad, on purchases. If fish needs to be returned, go to the effort of bringing it back immediately and pointing out the specific reasons for the return. When a fish is of exceptionally good quality, call the market and express your appreciation. Feedback like this makes a wet, difficult, and demanding job worthwhile.

ONCE YOU'VE BOUGHT THE FISH

Once you've put your fish-buying skills into practice and bought some beautiful fish, you need to preserve the *umami* until you're ready to cook and serve the fish. The quality is best at the time of purchase, so the sooner you use the fish, the better it will taste.

The most important thing is to keep the fish as cold as possible. If you aren't going straight home from the market, or if you have a long trip, ask the fishmonger to pack a bag of ice with your fish. As soon as you get home, transfer the fish to your refrigerator and pack it in some fresh ice. Whole fish, whether in the market or at home, should always have ice melting over them; the melting ice washes away bacteria and keeps the fish at 33°F. Fillets and steaks should be kept at this temperature, too (spoilage occurs twice as fast at 40° as it does at 32°); however, cut fish should not be kept in direct contact with the ice.

Fish sitting in its own juices is exposed to high bacteria counts, so arrange the fish and ice so that the melted ice is not in direct contact with the fish. For a large whole fish, set it on a rack in a roasting pan and pile the ice on top. If you don't have the space for this type of setup, just be sure that if juice does accumulate, you pour it off frequently. Put smaller fish and fillets and steaks in a plastic bag and put the bag in the ice.

I don't really recommend freezing fish in a home freezer because most residential freezers don't freeze fast enough. If the freezing process is slow, ice crystals form in the cells of the fish flesh. This damages the cells and can cause severe driploss in the thawed fish.

Jon Rowley is a Seattle-based consultant to restaurants, retailers, and the seafood industry. His quest to improve taste through better fish-handling practices led to his being named to "Who's Who of Cooking in America," and being dubbed the "fish missionary" by Julia Child. ♦

A good fish store uses lots of ice and sells lots of fish. The fish should be neatly arranged for efficient sale, not just for decoration. Cut fish should be kept cold but shouldn't sit directly on ice. Whole fish should be in lots of clean, white ice.



Wrap Up Flavor in Vietnamese Spring Rolls

A savory pork filling in crispy rice paper bundled up with noodles and fresh greens

BY NGUYEN THI THAI MORELAND



Each spring roll gets wrapped up in its own “salad,” making a bundle of fresh flavors and varied textures. The spring roll itself is fried until crunchy, and then it’s arranged with tender rice noodles, fresh mint, and cilantro and rolled up in a leaf of crisp romaine lettuce. Delicious all on its own, spring rolls are even better when dipped in nuoc cham, a sweet-salty-spicy dipping sauce that’s easy to make.



Photos: Martha Holmberg

If I had to name a national dish that both North and South Vietnam could claim, it would be Vietnamese spring rolls. Called *cha gio* in Vietnamese, spring rolls are crispy, golden brown, rice-paper wrappers filled with a savory vegetable, ground pork, and seafood stuffing. The rolls are served with whole romaine lettuce leaves, fresh mint, cilantro, and rice noodles. A spicy, garlicky dipping sauce called *nuoc cham*, at once sweet, tart, and salty, is the traditional accompaniment.

The exact recipe for spring rolls varies a little from cook to cook, and there are also regional differences. The North Vietnamese use jicama, a crunchy, starchy tuber, while Southern cooks use bean sprouts. Northern cooks also like to use crab meat and, when in season, the orange-red roe from female crabs. Shrimp is sometimes added to the filling in both Northern and Southern versions of the dish.

Spring rolls can be eaten as a snack or as an appetizer. You place a roll on a romaine leaf, add some fresh herbs and rice noodles, roll the lettuce leaf around the whole thing, dip the roll into the sauce, and bite into it. Eating spring rolls like this can be quite messy, but they're so delicious that you'll want to lick your fingers anyway. Spring rolls can also be served as a main course. Cut the spring rolls into two to four pieces, depending on their size, and serve them in a bowl filled with rice noodles, shredded lettuce, and the fresh herbs. Spoon some *nuoc cham* on top like a dressing. When spring rolls are served this way, chopsticks are the most efficient utensils with which to eat them, but a fork and spoon will do the trick, too.

Although spring rolls get their crispness from frying, they're not as fattening as you might think. If cooked properly, they absorb very little oil. I can fry a large batch of spring rolls in two cups of oil, measure the oil when I'm done, and find that I've only used a couple of tablespoons of oil.

EXOTIC INGREDIENTS THAT ARE EASY TO USE

Some of the traditional spring roll ingredients are familiar to Western cooks, like scallions, carrots, and fresh herbs, but many of the imported dried ingredients may seem quite exotic. They're all easy to use and relatively inexpensive, and since many of them have a long shelf life, you can save any leftovers until you make your next Asian dish. Most of the imported ingredients can be found in Asian grocery stores across the country. If you can't find the ingredients locally, see the box on p. 33 for mail-order sources.

Fish sauce (*nuoc mam* in Vietnam, *nam pla* in Thailand) is a fundamental ingredient in Southeast Asian cooking. It's a clear, pungent, salty, amber



These dried ingredients get plumped in warm water before use. The bottom row shows (from left to right) mushrooms, bean thread noodles, and black fungi as you would find them packaged in dried form. The samples in the top row have been soaked for 30 minutes. Notice how the fungi in particular have expanded and softened.

liquid made from fermented anchovies or other fish. In Vietnamese cooking, we use fish sauce as a seasoning like salt, and also as a condiment or dipping sauce at the table.

Dried mushrooms (*nam co*)—also called black winter mushrooms or fragrant mushrooms—are dried shiitake mushrooms, ranging from one to three inches in diameter. They're sold in several grades and prices. Look for the mushrooms with thick brown or black caps with obvious white fissures. These are the best quality, albeit the most expensive. Soak the mushrooms in warm water for about 30 minutes before use, and cut off and discard the woody stems.

Dried black fungi—also called tree ear fungi, black tree fungi, cloud ear, wood ear, or sometimes simply dried vegetable—are fungi that grow on fallen tree trunks; they look like floppy ears sticking out from the tree. Dried fungi are commonly sold in four-ounce bags in Asian grocery stores. Buy the small fungi that look like tiny, gnarled black flakes. They're easier to use than the larger gray and white ones. Soak either variety in warm water for about 30 minutes and carefully rinse them before use.

Bean thread noodles (*mien*)—also called cellophane or glass noodles—are very fine, tough dried strands made from mung beans. They turn translucent when soaked in warm water and then cooked. Bean thread noodles are commonly sold in bundles of eight 1.8-ounce packages.

Dried rice noodles (*bun*)—also called rice sticks or rice vermicelli—are made from rice flour and water. They come in many widths, from fine to medium to extra wide. The noodles are commonly sold in one-pound packages, sometimes divided into four cakes. I



use the fine noodles to serve with my spring rolls.

Rice papers (*banh trang*) are very thin, dry, brittle, almost translucent wrappers made from rice flour, water, and salt. Rice papers are available in several sizes, in both round and triangular shapes. The size I like to use for spring rolls is the eight-inch round, usually sold in one-pound packages of 45 to 50 sheets.

VIETNAMESE SPRING ROLLS

Don't be intimidated by the many ingredients listed for the filling mixture, as the recipe is really very flexible. Just use as many ingredients as you wish, as long as you don't omit the rice paper, lean pork, and fresh vegetables. The fish sauce is worth tracking down, too, as it gives the spring rolls and the dipping sauce a distinctively authentic taste. Makes approximately 48 rolls.

FOR THE FILLING:

5 dried mushrooms
¼ cup dried black fungi
1 small (1.8-oz.) package of bean thread noodles
1 lb. very lean, coarsely ground pork (grind at home, if possible)
1 large egg
½ cup thinly sliced scallions
1 cup minced onion
1 cup julienned or shredded carrot
2 cups julienned or shredded jicama (1 extra cup each of onion and carrot can be substituted for the jicama)
1 tsp. sugar
1 Tbs. fish sauce
¼ tsp. salt
1½ tsp. coarsely ground black pepper
½ cup minced raw shrimp (optional)
½ cup crab meat (optional)

FOR WRAPPING AND FRYING:

2 cups warm water
2 Tbs. sugar
¼ cup cider vinegar
1-lb. package of 8-in.-round rice papers
2 cups vegetable oil, such as olive or canola, for frying

FOR THE DIPPING SAUCE:

6 large cloves garlic, minced fine
1 to 2 large hot red peppers (such as red jalapeño or serrano) or ¼ red bell pepper (use red bell pepper for color if you don't care for hot peppers)
1 cup water
⅓ cup cider vinegar
¼ cup sugar
¼ cup julienned or shredded jicama or white radish
¼ cup julienned or shredded carrot
⅓ cup fish sauce

FOR SERVING:

1-lb. package fine rice noodles
Romaine lettuce
Fresh mint and cilantro

Make the filling—In separate bowls of warm water, soak the dried mushrooms, dried black fungi, and bean thread noodles for 30 min. Drain and squeeze the dried mushrooms, cut off and discard the woody stems, and slice the mushrooms thin. Drain and rinse the fungi well to remove any sand. Drain and chop them coarse; you should have about 1 cup. Drain the bean thread noodles and, using a large knife, cut them into 1-in. sections; you should have about 1½ cups.

In a large mixing bowl, combine all the filling ingredients. Using both hands, mix the ingredients until very well blended. Set aside.



Wrap the spring rolls—In a shallow, round, flat-bottomed dish, combine the warm water, sugar, and cider vinegar. Stir to dissolve the sugar.

Have two colanders on hand, each colander set on a plate. Submerge a sheet of rice paper in the rice-paper bath, prop it on the side of a colander to drain and soften. Repeat with 4 to 5 sheets. Handle the rice paper gently, since it's very brittle when dry. If the rice paper breaks, dip it anyway, set it aside and use a new sheet. The broken sheet can later be used to patch any holes that you find in other sheets of rice paper. Try to keep softened sheets of rice paper from touching each other since they'll stick together fiercely.

Place a softened sheet of rice paper on the work surface. Drop a heaping tablespoon of the spring roll filling 1 in. in from the lower edge, and shape the filling into a 3-in. roll. Fold the edge of the rice paper over the filling, roll once, then fold both of the side edges in. Finish rolling to form a neat cylinder. Be sure to roll loosely so the stuffing has room to expand during cooking. This prevents the rice paper from breaking open. Set the spring roll on a platter, seam side down (this will seal the seam).

Continue dipping and rolling until the filling mixture is gone. You should have about 4 dozen spring rolls.

The filling can be made beforehand and refrigerated for up to a day, or divided up and frozen in tightly sealed plastic bags for up to a month. When frozen, the texture of the filling may soften slightly, but the results will be fine. You can fill and roll the spring rolls and leave them on the counter draped with a damp paper towel up to an hour before frying.

The rice papers don't soften immediately.

Dip them in the warm water mixture (top photo) just until they're entirely moistened, and then prop them against the side of a colander, where they'll drain and, in a minute or so, soften into a pliable texture.

Wrap the rolls delicately, taking care not to tear the fragile rice paper (photo above). Small rips won't be a problem, but larger holes might let the filling fall out during cooking. Don't add too much filling to each roll since the rolls are more attractive when they're slim and compact in shape.

Fry the spring rolls—In a large, nonstick frying pan, heat the oil on medium high until very hot but not smoking (360°F). Put a few rolls in the frying pan, folded edge down so they won't open during cooking, leaving a little space between each roll. The oil should be bubbling around the spring rolls, but not splashing or smoking. Using tongs or long chopsticks, turn the rolls occasionally until they're light golden brown all over. Keep an eye on them so they don't get too brown and overcooked.

Line a large bowl with several layers of paper towels. Transfer the cooked rolls to the bowl and drain them by standing them up inside the rim of the bowl. If you want to make the spring rolls ahead, you can lightly fry them until the filling is cooked, drain, and let them cool completely. Then you can quickly fry them again later to make them crispy.

Make the dipping sauce—While the spring rolls are cooking, combine all the sauce ingredients in a bowl and mix until the sugar is dissolved.

Serve the spring rolls—Soak the rice noodles in warm water for 30 min. Bring a medium pan of water to a boil. After soaking, drain the rice noodles and toss them into the

boiling water. Boil for 2 min. and drain immediately. (These noodles are very easy to overcook, so don't lose track of time.) Set aside until cool.

Serve the spring rolls wrapped in whole leaves of romaine lettuce (or any lettuce that won't wilt when exposed to the hot spring rolls) with fresh cilantro, mint, rice noodles, and the dipping sauce. To serve as a main course, cut two or three spring rolls with scissors or a knife into segments and serve in a bowl on top of rice noodles, with shredded fresh herbs, shredded lettuce, and some of the dipping sauce spooned on top.



Spring rolls drain best when standing up. When the fried rolls are placed almost vertically in a bowl lined with paper towels, the excess grease drains off easily and the rolls stay crunchy. These rolls are ready to eat, either wrapped in fresh greens (see photo on p. 30) and dipped in sauce or cut into chunks and scattered over a bowl of rice noodles and fresh herbs.

SOURCES FOR SPRING ROLL INGREDIENTS

Anzen Importers, 736 N.E. MLK Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97232; 503/233-5111.

China Trading Co., 271 Crown St., New Haven, CT 06511-6696; 203/865-9465, ask for Jeanne Hom-Tong.

Kam Man Food Products, 200 Canal St., New York, NY 10013; 212/571-0330, ask for Mr. Chan.

Oriental Food Market and Cooking School, 2801 W. Howard St., Chicago, IL 60645; 312/274-2826.

The Oriental Pantry, 423 Great Road (2A), Acton, MA 01720; 800/828-0368.

Spice Merchant, PO Box 524, Jackson Hole, WY 83001; 800/551-5999.

Vietnam Imports, 922 W. Broad St., Rte. 7, Falls Church, VA 22046, 703/534-9441, ask for Peter Tran.

The rolling process is easy, and gets even easier after you've done a few. Start by tucking the edge of the rice paper over the filling, molding the filling a little with your fingers to form a cylinder, and then rolling once. Fold in the side edges neatly.



Keep rolling, but keep it loose. Don't roll the rice paper too tightly because the filling expands during cooking. It needs a little room to grow or it might make the wrapper burst.



Roll the whole batch—they can wait. Keep the uncooked spring rolls draped with a barely damp paper towel for up to one hour before cooking. Make sure to place each roll seam side down, so it won't come undone.



Nguyen Thi Thai Moreland was born and raised in Vietnam. She moved to the United States with her family in 1973. She's the owner of the Dragon Lady Valet, a dry cleaning store in midtown Manhattan. Spring rolls are her favorite dish to serve at parties. ♦

Four Courses in Italian

Pasta is at the heart of a feast that balances flavor, texture, and color

BY JOHANNE KILLEEN & GEORGE GERMON

As practicing artists, we traveled to Italy to study the Great Masters. While their works inspired and instructed us, we fell in love with the Italian way of life and we were swept up in the Italians' deep affection for food and their joy in simple daily rituals. Surrounded by markets brimming with fresh, silvery fish, whole sides of meat, fragrant berries, and pungent cheeses, we were simply intoxicated. We came back imbued with the passion for food that eventually led us to become chefs.

INSPIRATION IN SIMPLICITY

The Italians understand balance in cooking—not only in a single course but in the procession of

dishes that make up a meal. You can spend hours at the table enjoying the company of family and friends while sharing the sensual pleasure of food.

Today, in our restaurant in Providence, Rhode Island, we recreate Italy's smells, tastes, and rhythms in our kitchen. We begin our ritual at the market, shopping for the best possible ingredients and building a menu from our choices.

A bushel basket chock full of red and yellow peppers may be an inspiration. The scent of tomatoes, fresh off the vine and warm from the sun, immediately gets our attention. Treating food with respect and simplicity enhances the inherent flavor of each ingredient.



Before you slice the lasagna, let it rest for a few minutes after you take the dish out of the oven. This patience allows the lasagna to set and ensures the pasta course won't burn your guests' mouths.



MENU

Spicy White Bean Salad
with Summer Corn and
Crunchy Cucumbers

Bruschetta



Fresh Zucchini Lasagna



Braised Polpettone



Zinfandel-Poached Pears with
Poire William Mascarpone

*A rustic presentation
makes great casual
eating. Just put a
spoonful of the
white bean and
cucumber salad on
the bruschetta and
take a generous bite.*

HOW TO EAT LIKE AN ITALIAN

Whether the two of us cook for each other or we plan a dinner party, we try to make a little feast of many tastes. We want to linger over each course, savor the flavors, rinse the palate with a sip of wine, and anticipate the next dish.

Here, we adopt the structure of the Italian meal—typically four courses, though the number can expand to eight or more. There is always an inspirational dish from which all the other courses derive. Pasta is our passion, and we almost always select that dish first. For this menu, it's Fresh Zucchini Lasagna. As an antipasto (the course served before the pasta), we serve Spicy White Bean Salad with Summer Corn and Crunchy Cucumbers. Braised *polpettone* is the third course. *Polpettone* are large meatballs, and ours are oval meat loaves braised in an aromatic broth. Dessert in Italy is most often fresh fruit. For this menu, we have a dressed-up version—Zinfandel-Poached Pears with Poire William Mascarpone (a soft cream cheese enhanced with pear brandy). In each dish and course, we aim for balance and contrast in taste and texture.

Antipasto. Our Spicy White Bean Salad pairs the creamy texture of the beans with the snap of cool cucumbers; a hit of spicy pepper acts as a counterpoint to the sweetness of fresh corn. The fruit-and-acid combination of extra-virgin olive oil and fresh lemon juice anoints the salad. The pastel colors of this salad benefit from the vibrant green of fresh parsley. As an accompaniment, we serve a piece of bruschetta—toasted bread rubbed with a bit of pungent garlic. Not too much garlic, though—you don't want to overwhelm the salad's subtle flavors. You must toast the bruschetta just before serving, but you can prepare the salad in advance and enjoy it as the Italians might, at room temperature.

The pasta course. Many years ago, a trip to a Roman trattoria inspired our Fresh Zucchini Lasagna. At this restaurant, layers of thin, homemade sheets of pasta concealed slices of sautéed artichoke hearts and grated *parmigiano reggiano*. Cheese-sprinkled béchamel sauce bathed the top, which was crispy and brown from the oven. We were raised on lasagna made with thick, curly noodles filled with meat, tomato sauce, and pints of ricotta cheese, and this "new" inter-

pretation opened a range of possibilities. Any visit to the vegetable market could result in a lasagna variation. Here, we use fresh zucchini—plentiful and delicious in this season.

You can prepare your own pasta or locate the “ondine”—a style of dried lasagna noodle made by Delverde—suggested here. It is a light, delicate noodle of exceptional quality. If these noodles are unavailable (or if you prefer), you can use homemade pasta or prepared fresh pasta sheets, which are available in some supermarkets. Do *not* substitute the widely available, curly edged, dried lasagna noodles; they’re too thick and rubbery for this dish.

Many cooks suggest assembling and partially cooking baked pasta hours—even a day—ahead. We disagree. Once subjected to moisture, pasta continues to soften and you can end up with a baking dish of mush. Though you have a bit more leeway with homemade lasagna noodles or the ondine, we

These are “no-boil” lasagna noodles, but the authors prefer to cook them anyway. A brief, three-minute bath in boiling water makes the noodles especially tender and delicate in the final dish.



Don’t worry if your zucchini slices become a little brown while baking. Browning happens when the heat caramelizes the vegetable’s natural sugars, and this means more flavor in the lasagna.



nonetheless suggest cooking the noodles and assembling the dish as close to mealtime as possible—certainly no more than an hour ahead.

The meat course. We serve braised *polpettone* with a little of the braising liquid, and perhaps just a dollop of mashed potatoes. In America, our courses usually build in weight and importance to the “main course.” In Italy, each course is of equal importance. Serving small, diverse portions is an interesting and satisfying way to eat. Your palate never has a chance to become tired.

Dessert. Italians consider dessert a palate cleanser, so this usually is a simple course of fresh fruit with cheese. Our final course—Zinfandel-Poached Pears with Poire William Mascarpone—uses these ingredients in a more elaborate manner. Mascarpone cheese is a rich cream cheese. Regular cream cheese can be substituted, but it’s worth the effort to seek out mascarpone for its full flavor and silky texture. Or, for the easiest dessert, skip the cheese altogether and place the pear on a nest of whipped cream.

A touch of eau de vie is an excellent addition to the cheese or cream. We use Poire William, a pear brandy noted for its distinctive container: a mature pear sits, still marinating, in the bottle. If you prefer, a number of other flavorings, such as a flavored grappa or simple vanilla extract, can be substituted. If possible, peel the pears just before you put them in the simmering wine. If the pears must sit for any length of time after they’re peeled, rub the fruit with lemon juice to prevent browning.

We still travel to Italy, but devote less time to visiting museums, churches, and monuments. The passion for art and architecture remains, only now we absorb our surroundings as we walk between lunch and dinner. Very often, we catch up with food artisans and chefs who have become friends over the years. These friends’ dinner invitations have been the most inspirational. As one friend said, “We all have three chances each day to eat something wonderful.” In Italy, those chances come at least three times each meal.

SPICY WHITE BEAN SALAD WITH SUMMER CORN AND CRUNCHY CUCUMBERS

The flavors in this recipe depend on the freshest ingredients. Serve warm or at room temperature with bruschetta (recipe at right) and a glass of pinot bianco or chardonnay. Serves eight to ten.

- 8 oz. (1¼ cups) good-quality dried white beans (we suggest Great Northern)
- 1 medium onion, cut into quarters
- 2 medium cloves garlic, peeled
- 2 cups fresh, cooked corn kernels (cut from 6 to 8 ears)
- 1 small cucumber (about 8 oz.), peeled, seeded, and diced
- 1 fresh chile pepper (jalapeño or serrano), seeded and minced
- ½ cup Italian parsley leaves, chopped fine
- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ⅓ cup lemon juice
- 1 tsp. kosher salt (or more to taste)



These ingredients are at hand and ready to go. It's easiest to assemble the lasagna when all the components are fully prepared.

Pick over and wash the beans, cover with cold water, and allow to soak overnight. Drain the beans, put them in a pot with 2 qt. cold water, the onion, and the garlic cloves. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer until tender, 45 min. to 1½ hours, depending on the freshness of the beans. Drain the beans, discarding the onion and garlic. Allow to cool to room temperature. Put the beans in a mixing bowl with the corn, cucumber, chile pepper, and parsley. Toss with the olive oil and lemon juice and season with salt. Serve warm or at room temperature.

BRUSCHETTA

The thickness of the bread is important in this recipe. We suggest cutting ¾-inch-thick slices so the bread will still be moist and chewy on the inside after toasting. You should lavishly drizzle the olive oil over the toasted bread. If a charcoal grill isn't available, broil the bread slices. Serves eight to ten.

1 loaf good-quality Italian bread
2 to 3 large garlic cloves, peeled
4 to 5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, or more to taste
Kosher salt, to taste

Prepare a charcoal fire, setting the grill rack about 4 in. above the coals. (Alternatively, turn on the oven's broiler.) Cut the bread into ¾-in.-thick slices on a diagonal, discarding (or snacking on) the heels. (An average loaf should give you about 12 slices, but you only need as many slices as you have guests.) Toast both sides of each piece of bread over the fire or in the broiler. Remove the bread from the heat and rub one side of each slice with the garlic cloves. The texture of the toasted bread acts like sandpaper on the garlic, wearing it down so that its pulp and juice fill the pores of the bread. The more garlic you rub into the bread, the stronger the flavor. Put the bread on a serving platter, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Serve immediately.

FRESH ZUCCHINI LASAGNA

This recipe calls for Delverde on-dine lasagna noodles (see Sources on p. 38). These are light and delicate "no-boil" noodles. You'll get the best results, however, if you follow our method, which calls for a brief boiling before assembly. If instead you use fresh pasta, drop the lasagna noodles into boiling water, a few at a time, and cook for 30 seconds. Drain and refresh under cold running water to stop the cooking process and to prevent the noodles from sticking together. Follow the same instructions for assembling and baking. We like to serve this with a light red wine, such as a Dolcetto d'Alba or a Chianti classico. Serves eight.

FOR THE BÉCHAMEL:
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 Tbs. unbleached flour
1½ cups milk
½ tsp. kosher salt

FOR THE FILLING AND ASSEMBLY:

1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. unsalted butter
2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 medium onions (12 to 14 oz. total), halved and sliced thin lengthwise
2 to 3 tsp. kosher salt
2 lb. fresh zucchini (about 6 or 7), trimmed and cut lengthwise into ¼-in.-thick slices
4 sheets Delverde Instant Lasagna Ondine (each sheet approximately 8 by 6 in.)
4 oz. fresh mozzarella packed in water, drained and sliced ½ to ¾ cup freshly grated parmigiano reggiano

YES, IT REALLY IS EASY

No part of our Italian feast is difficult to prepare, and to make it even easier, we've designed a countdown of the preparations you can do ahead of time—and those you must leave to the last minute.—J.K. & G.G.

1 to 2 days before dinner

- ◆ Soak and cook beans for bean salad
- ◆ Make béchamel sauce for lasagna
- ◆ Slice and sauté onions for lasagna
- ◆ Make braising liquid for *polpettone*
- ◆ Poach pears

Day of dinner

- ◆ Prepare white bean salad
- ◆ Slice and roast zucchini for lasagna
- ◆ Prepare *polpettone* mixture

1 to 2 hours before serving

- ◆ Boil lasagna noodles
- ◆ Assemble and bake lasagna
- ◆ Assemble *polpettone*
- ◆ Whip mascarpone and cream for pears

The guests are waiting

- ◆ Prepare bruschetta
- ◆ Take lasagna out of the oven
- ◆ Bake *polpettone*

To make the béchamel—Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Add the flour and stir with a wooden spoon until the mixture is smooth. Continue to stir until the mixture has bubbled for 2 min. Take care not to allow the flour to brown. Very slowly, pour the milk into the flour-butter mixture, stirring constantly. When all the milk is incorporated, bring the mixture to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for about 5 minutes, or until the béchamel has thick-

ened to the consistency of thick cream. Stir in the salt, remove from the heat, and set aside. It will thicken as it cools. (You can make the béchamel several hours to a day ahead; cool it before refrigerating. If you do make it in advance, reheat it very slowly.) If the béchamel is not a pourable consistency, add a little more milk.

To make the filling—Heat the oven to 450°F. Heat 1 tsp. butter and 1 Tbs. olive oil in a large skillet. Add the onion and ½ tsp. salt and sauté over medium heat, without browning, until the onions are very soft, 20 to 25 min. Set aside.

With a pastry brush, lightly coat 1 or 2 baking sheets with olive oil. Put the zucchini slices on the sheets in a single layer, brush with some of the remain-

ing olive oil, sprinkle with ½ tsp. salt, and roast for 20 to 25 min., or until tender and cooked through. Rotate the sheet if the zucchini seems to be browning unevenly. If you need to use more than one sheet, you can use both the upper and lower oven racks and rotate the sheets halfway through roasting. The zucchini slices should be tender. Don't worry if the zucchini browns a bit; it will add a nice flavor to the finished lasagna.

To assemble the lasagna—Lower the oven temperature to 375°. Bring 5 qt. water to a boil and add the remaining salt. Drop the ondine noodles into the boiling water and cook them for about 3 min., until the pasta is soft and pliable. Drain and lay them out on a damp tea towel. Drizzle 3 Tbs. of the béchamel on the bottom of an 8- or 9-in.-square baking pan. Dot with butter. Cover with a lasagna noodle, 3 Tbs. béchamel, and one-third each of the zucchini slices, sautéed onions, and mozzarella. Sprinkle with a quarter of the *parmigiano reggiano*. Repeat with two more layers of these ingredients. Top with the last noodle, coat it with the remaining béchamel, dot with butter, and sprinkle with the remaining *parmigiano reggiano*. Loosely cover the lasagna with foil and bake for 10 min. Uncover and bake for an additional 15 to 20 min., until the top is golden and the filling is hot and bubbling. Allow the lasagna to cool for 5 to 7 min. before cutting and serving.

BRAISED POLPETTONE

These *polpettone* couldn't be easier: make the braising liquid, form the loaves, put the loaves in the liquid, and bake. Serve one loaf to each guest. We've created the recipe to

SOURCES FOR ONDINE PASTA

If you can't find Delverde ondine locally, you can call the distributor for the closest retailer or contact one of the following mail-order suppliers.

Distributor

Fara San Martino, Inc., 278 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211; 718/384-3915.

Mail-order suppliers

Cacciatore Bros., 2301 W. Martin Luther King, Tampa, FL 33605; 813/872-8922.

Central Grocery, 923 Decatur St., New Orleans, LA 70116; 504/523-1620.

Grace's Marketplace, 1237 Third Ave., New York, NY 10021; 212/737-0600.

International Home Cooking, 305 Mallory St., Rocky Mount, NC 27801; 800/237-7423.

Cover the poaching pears with kitchen parchment. The pears float in the simmering wine, and the parchment helps keep the fruit moist.



make eight four-inch loaves, but if you find those portions too large, scale down the loaves accordingly. The *polpettone* mixture also makes excellent meatballs. A good wine for this dish would be a Gaja or a rich red wine like a Bricco dell'Uccellone. Serves eight.

FOR THE BRAISING LIQUID:

2 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 small onions (about $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. total), chopped fine
1 clove garlic, peeled
2 cups rich homemade chicken stock, or canned, low-salt chicken stock
1 cup tomato juice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE POLPETTONE:

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. lean ground beef
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup freshly grated parmigiano reggiano
1 tsp. kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. Italian parsley leaves, chopped fine
1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, chopped fine
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups fresh bread crumbs
1 cup milk
2 eggs

To prepare the braising liquid—Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the onion and garlic, and sauté over low heat until the onion is soft and golden brown, about 20 min. Add the chicken stock, tomato juice, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then simmer over low heat until the liquid has reduced slightly and the flavors have mingled, about 20 min.

To make the *polpettone*—Heat the oven to 375°. Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix thoroughly to blend. Shape the mixture into 8 ovals about 4 in. long and 1 in. thick. Place the *polpettone* in a single layer in a flameproof roasting pan. Pour in enough braising liquid (about 2 cups) to come up the sides of the *polpettone*, but not to cover. Bring to a boil on the stovetop and then transfer to the oven. Bake the *polpettone* until firm to the touch, about 30 to 35 min. Check after 15 min. If needed, add more braising liquid to bring the liquid back to the original level. Remove the pan from the oven and leave to rest for 5 min. Use a spoon to skim off any fat from the braising liquid. With a spatula, transfer the *polpettone* to a heated serving dish or individual dinner plates and spoon some braising liquid over them.

ZINFANDEL-POACHED PEARS WITH POIRE WILLIAM MASCARPONE

Try serving this with a Braquetto D'Aqui, an incredible red dessert wine. You may replenish the poaching liquid with additional wine and brown sugar to make another batch of pears. Freeze the syrup if you won't use it within four days. Serves eight.

1 bottle ($3\frac{1}{3}$ cups) zinfandel or other fruity red wine
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups dark brown sugar, packed
8 small pears (about $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb.)
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups mascarpone
2 Tbs. sugar
1 Tbs. Poire William eau de vie, vanilla extract, or other liqueur
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream

In a pot large enough to hold all the pears, bring the wine and brown sugar to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat until the wine simmers. Cut a thin slice off the bottom of each pear so that it will stand upright when served. Peel the pears, leaving the stems intact, and



Photo: Robert Mansala

place them in the hot wine immediately. Portions of the pears will not submerge. To keep all sides of the pears moist, lay a piece of kitchen parchment directly over them. Lower the heat and poach the pears, turning occasionally, until they're tender when pierced with a skewer. The time will vary from 30 min. for ripe fruit to over an hour for hard pears. Cool the pears to room temperature in their liquid. Cover them and chill in the refrigerator for 8 hours or overnight. If possible, turn the pears after four hours for even coloring. The pears benefit from marinating, as their flavor improves and their color deepens to a rich purple-red.

Whisk together the mascarpone, sugar, and Poire William. Whip the cream until it forms stiff peaks. To serve, divide the mascarpone among 8 plates, spreading the cheese with the back of a spoon into a thin layer about 5 in. in diameter. Place a dollop of whipped cream in the center and push a pear into the center of the mound. Drizzle 1 to 2 Tbs. of the poaching liquid over the pears and serve.

The last spoonful.

After pears simmer in a mixture of zinfandel and brown sugar, the cooking liquid serves as a final touch for the poached fruit dessert.

Johanne Killeen and George Germon are graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design. They now own and operate their restaurant, Al Forno, in Providence, Rhode Island. ♦

Keeping Knives Sharp

If you want keen edges, you've got to get abrasive

BY SUZANNE ROMAN

Dull knives are no fun. Instead of slicing quickly and cleanly or mincing finely, a dull knife mauls food, smashing and ripping rather than cutting. Touching up the knife's edge with a butcher's steel may improve it a little, but after a while the metal on the knife's edge has bent and chipped so much that there's little of the edge left for the steel to realign. It's time to hone the knife, to abrade a little bit of metal to form a new, sharp edge.

There's no need to send your knives out to be sharpened, or to use the rotary sharpener on the back of an electric can opener, which will grind your chef's knife down to a paring knife in no time. That's because you can choose from a variety of really effective tools to sharpen your knives. I'm going to describe four types of abrasive sharpeners that can put a new edge on your knives without taking off too much expensive steel.

Some require a bit of skill and a steady hand, others do more of the work for you. You can spend as little as \$8 for a ceramic sharpener, or close to \$100 for a diamond abrasive.

Steeling vs. honing—

Keeping your knives sharp needn't be a constant chore. While it's a good idea to steel your knives every time you use them, you'll probably need to hone them only once every couple of months, depending on how often you use them and on the kind of metal they're made from. Hard stainless-steel knives stay sharp for a long time, but they're not easy to resharpen. Soft carbon-steel knives (the kind that stain when they come in contact with food) will dull faster but are easier to sharpen. Even though most of the more expensive new knives are made from a high-carbon stainless-steel blend and will stay sharp longer than carbon-steel knives, they too will get dull.

Before going any further, I need to define and clarify some common terms. "Steeling" a knife, something you see butchers do often, is not the same thing as sharpening or honing. Steeling, which involves passing the knife's edge along the length of a finely ridged steel rod, is not intended to create a fresh, new edge, but rather to refurbish and

burnish an already sharp edge. In other words, steeling won't make a dull edge sharp. (For more on steeling, see Basics on p. 69.) "Sharpening" or "honing" (I'll use the terms interchangeably here) uses an abrasive material to wear away the old, dull edge, to expose new metal beneath, and to establish a new, sharp edge.

Getting the right angle—When you sharpen a knife, you want to make sure that the two sides of the knife blade intersect evenly (at the same angle) along the length of the blade, making a sharp, symmetrical edge. Some knife sharpeners require more practice than others to consistently put a uniform bevel on both sides of the blade.

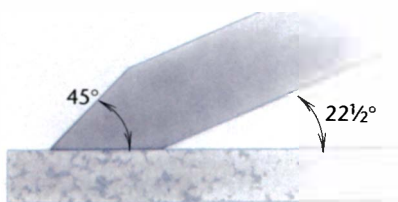
Honing a knife yourself gives you control over the sharpening angle, which determines not only how easily the knife will slice through food, but also how long the edge will last.

A knife honed to a sharp 20° angle will easily cut through food, but the attenuated edge has little metal to support it and will wear down quickly. The edge of a knife sharpened to a more obtuse

60° angle is quite strong because there's a good bit of metal right behind the edge, but the knife will need more force to cut through food. Most sources recommend sharpening a knife's edge to an angle between 30° and 45°, a good compromise between sharpness and durability.

Double-bevel for a durable edge—You can also get a strong, sharp edge by first putting on a thin, narrow edge, and then sharpening just the very edge at a second, more obtuse angle. The blunter angle keeps the knife sharp longer, while the thin overall profile of the edge will enable the blade to cut easily into food. Some ceramic-rod knife sharpeners, described below, make it easy to put on this kind of two-bevel edge. The Chef'sChoice 110, an electric sharpener, even puts on a third bevel.

The smoother the abrasive, the more polished the edge—When choosing a knife sharpener, you also need to think about how abrasive the sharpening materials (called "hones") are.



Sharpen each side of the blade to half the overall desired angle. To put on a strong and sharp 45° edge, hold the knife at half that angle (22½°) from the sharpening stone.

Coarse hones take off metal fast and leave a rough, sawlike edge. The knives will need a few strokes on a steel to smooth off some of the edge's raggedness. For kitchen knives, a saw-toothed edge isn't such a bad thing. Just as a serrated knife will slice through a tomato skin when a smoother edge can't get a start, a jagged edge helps the knife bite into food. But over time, the individual "teeth" of a ragged edge will bend and break off, dulling the knife and requiring steeling and more frequent sharpening. Finer hones don't take off as much metal with each pass, so it may take more work to put a good edge on the blade, but they leave a smoother, more polished edge that doesn't need to be steeled right away.

No matter what sharpener you use, make sure your fingers are out of the path of the knife blade. The instructions that come with the sharpener will tell you how to hold the sharpener so that your hands aren't in danger.

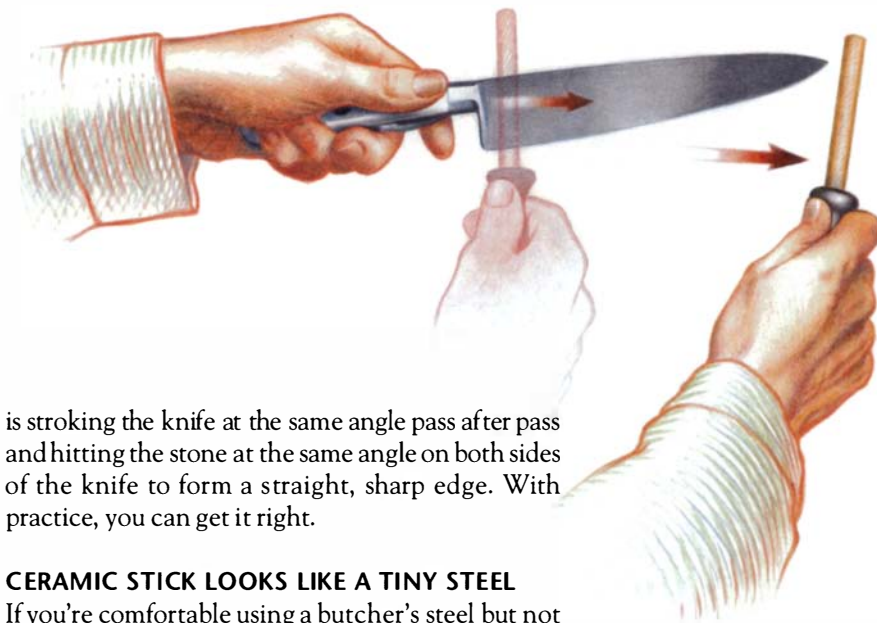
THE OLD STANDBY, SHARPENING STONES

The traditional tool used for honing knives is the sharpening stone. Sharpening stones are made from a variety of materials, from natural Arkansas stone, to manmade Carborundum stones, to diamond-studded blocks, all of which are available in a range of grits (coarseness). The stones vary in price from \$10 to over \$100 and can be found in kitchen-supply, hardware, and specialty tool shops.

Sharpening stones give no angular guidance—you have to rely on feel, sight, and sound as you scrape the knife at an angle across the stone. To hone a knife on a sharpening stone, first anchor the stone to the table by placing it on a damp towel. Depending on the kind of stone, put on a coating of oil or water. The liquid keeps metal particles from clogging the pores in the stone and glazing it over. Put the heel of the knife on the short end of the stone nearest you, edge facing out, and with both hands supporting the knife at the desired angle, push the knife across the stone (see illustration above right). Turn the knife over and, starting contact at the heel of the knife and moving up towards the tip, pull the knife towards you. Repeat the strokes on both sides of the knife until the edge is sharp.

You can sharpen a knife to any angle you want with a sharpening stone. The angle of the edge you're putting on depends on how high you lift the back of the blade off the stone. Remember that you're putting half the angle on each side of the blade, so hold the blade just $22\frac{1}{2}^\circ$ from the stone for a 45° angle (see illustration at left). Hold the back of the knife closer to the stone for a smaller angle and a thinner edge, or hold the back higher for a blunter edge. The difficulty with using a stone

Use smooth, consistent strokes with a sharpening stone. Placing the heel of the knife on the short end of the stone nearest you, slide the knife across the stone, pulling it from heel to tip as you go. Flip the knife over and sharpen the other side, pulling the knife towards you and sliding it from heel to tip.

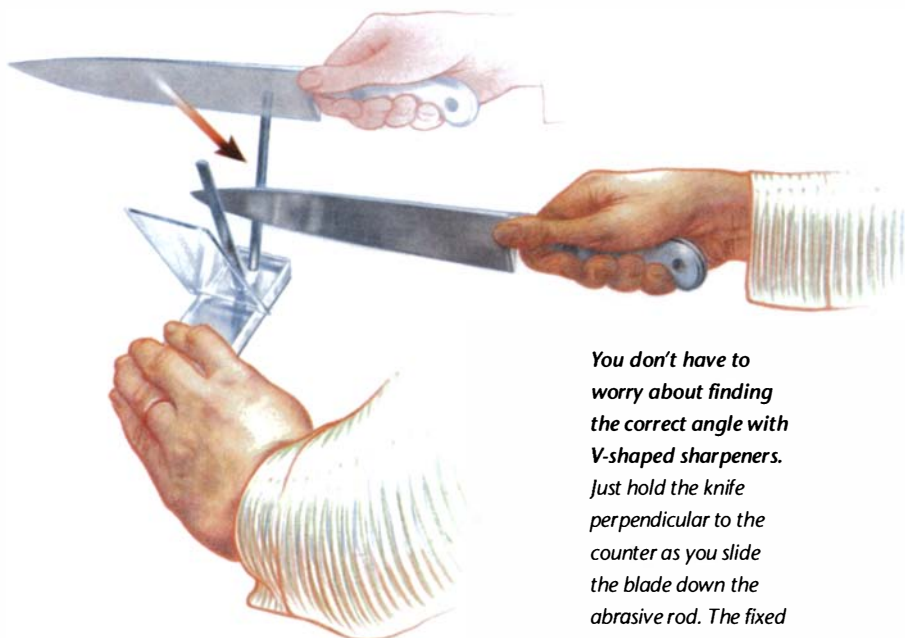


is stroking the knife at the same angle pass after pass and hitting the stone at the same angle on both sides of the knife to form a straight, sharp edge. With practice, you can get it right.

CERAMIC STICK LOOKS LIKE A TINY STEEL

If you're comfortable using a butcher's steel but not a sharpening stone, you may want to try honing your knives with a ceramic stick. The Zip-Zap sharpener (The Zanger Company, PO Box 1184, Enfield, CT 06082; 800/229-4687) is available in kitchen-supply and hardware stores for about \$8. The four-inch-long medium-grit ceramic stick is fixed in a wooden handle that keeps your fingers out of the way of the blade. You use the ceramic stick the way you would a steel. Holding the knife still, rest the cylindrical stick on the edge of the knife near the heel and push the stick towards the tip of the knife. Turn the knife over and push the stick along the other side of the blade. Repeat on both sides until the knife is sharp. As with the sharpening stone, you can use a ceramic stick to

This ceramic knife sharpener looks like a tiny steel, but it actually takes off metal. Hold the knife still and draw the ceramic stick along the edge with slow, steady strokes.



You don't have to worry about finding the correct angle with V-shaped sharpeners. Just hold the knife perpendicular to the counter as you slide the blade down the abrasive rod. The fixed position of the rod will create the right angle.



Magnets guide the knife at precisely the right angle on the Chef'sChoice, putting on a smooth, strong, triple-bevel edge. Orbiting diamond abrasives hone and polish the edge, but take off very little metal.

sharpen a knife to any angle that you like, but you have to judge the angle by eye and by feel.

V-SHAPED RODS SET THE ANGLE

If you want a little help controlling the angle of the edge you put on a knife, check out the V-shaped sharpeners. Produced by several companies, these sharpeners have ceramic or diamond-encrusted rods set at a fixed angle in a plastic or wooden base. By simply keeping the knife perpendicular to the counter as you sharpen it, it's easy to sharpen the knife at a consistent angle. To use these sharpeners, hold the heel of the knife against the inside of one of the rods. Pull the knife towards you and down so that the knife rubs along the entire length of the abrasive rod (see illustration above). Do the same thing on the inside of the second rod to sharpen the other side of the knife.

With some of these sharpeners, you can set the rods at two different angles. Not only does this give you a choice between a thinner edge and a blunter edge, but by using both settings on the same knife edge, you can put a strong double bevel on the knife. To do this, first

sharpen your knife on the narrow setting and then create the secondary bevel on the wider setting.

The DiamondVee resembles the ceramic rod sharpeners, but has coarse-diamond-covered rods that are quite aggressive and quickly put a new edge on a knife. The edge is more saw-toothed than what you'd get from ceramic rods, but you can smooth out some of the roughness by burnishing the knife on a steel.

Ceramic rod sharpeners range in size and price, from pocket models with four-inch rods for about \$15 to larger sets with eight-inch rods for around \$40. (Two leading manufacturers are Lansky Sharpeners, PO Box 800, Buffalo, NY 14231-0800; 716/877-7511; and Spyderco, PO Box 800, Golden, CO 80402; 800/525-7770.) The DiamondVee (Diamond Machining Technology Inc., 85 Hayes Memorial Dr., Marlborough, MA 01752; 508/481-5944) sells for about \$32.

TRIPLE-BEVEL EDGE FROM THE CHEF'SCHOICE

If you want the knife sharpener to do all the work, take a look at the Chef'sChoice 110. This electric sharpener has magnetic guides that hold the knife steady as you pull it past diamond-abrasive pads. With the Chef'sChoice, you sharpen a knife in three stages to put on a polished triple-bevel edge.

Using a loose grip, start by pulling the knife through the first of three pairs of slots (each pair has a slot for each side of the knife) that uses a coarse diamond abrasive to grind a 40° edge on the knife. Three times on each side of the knife puts on a rough-textured edge. Depending on the angle your knife was previously sharpened to, this first set of slots may take off a good bit of metal. Yet unless you chip the knife, you shouldn't have to grind it with the coarse abrasive again.

Next, pull the knife through the second set of slots four times on each side of the blade. This puts on a 45° bevel with a finer-grit diamond abrasive. A half dozen quick pulls through the third set finishes the sharpening. Just the very edge hits the fine diamond-dust abrasive at a 50° angle, completing the strong triple bevel. When a knife sharpened on the Chef'sChoice gets dull, you don't touch up the edge with a steel. Instead, you pass the knife a few times through both the second and third sets of slots. They put on a sharp new edge but don't take off much metal.

The Chef'sChoice (Edgecraft Corporation, 825 Southwood Rd., Avondale, PA 19311; 800/342-3255) is available in many kitchen-supply stores and sells for about \$80. Look for the model 110, which accepts a broader range of knives than the model 100.

Suzanne Roman is an assistant editor at Fine Cooking. ♦

Crème Anglaise: One Recipe, Many Desserts

A simple custard sauce becomes a variety of delicious and easy sweets

BY STEPHEN DURFEE

Properly mixed, the egg yolks and sugar will “ribbon.” Hand-mixing is easiest when you use a thick-handled whisk that has at least ten wires. The handle allows you to maintain a strong grip, and more wires mean more air is being whipped into the mixture.



What's an easy way to make brilliant desserts with just a minimum of effort and using only kitchen staples? If making *crème anglaise* pops in your head, great! If not, you're in for a surprise. *Crème anglaise* is a delicious sauce that can also be transformed into great desserts like ice cream and Bavarian cream. Its ingredients—milk, sugar, and egg yolks—are things you probably have on hand right now. Best of all, it's easy to prepare.

The secret to a successful *crème anglaise* is using the right equipment. A heavy-based saucepan is number one on the list; a thin pan can mean a curdled sauce. The pan should be large enough to

allow aggressive stirring. Never use an aluminum pan, because it will discolor the sauce.

The proper stirring utensils are also important. Your whisk should be long, with a good number of wires, narrow enough to reach into the corners of the pan, and have a thick handle for easy gripping. You should also have a wooden spoon.

Finally, you'll need three large stainless-steel bowls. Fill one halfway with ice water and reserve the others for mixing the ingredients.

MAKING THE CREME ANGLAISE

The preparation of *crème anglaise* can be broken down

“Temper” your egg-yolk-based mixture to avoid curdling.

The first step is to pour in some of the hot milk in a slow, steady trickle, whisking constantly.

Tempering is completed by whisking the hot-milk/egg-yolk/sugar mixture back into the remaining hot milk. The custard is ready to continue cooking at a low temperature. Use a wooden spoon to stir the custard in a figure-eight pattern.



To check the custard, draw a line. The crème anglaise has reached the correct consistency when you can draw a clear line on the back of a custard-coated spoon. The mixture should be very smooth (above.) The crème anglaise at right got too hot and curdled, giving it a mottled look and the aroma of cooked eggs. If this happens, throw it out and start over, taking care not to let the temperature rise above 180°F.



into three major steps: mixing, cooking, and cooling. It's important to observe the guidelines of each step to achieve the smoothest possible sauce. Otherwise, your sauce could be thin or, worse, scrambled.

Measure the milk into the saucepan and sprinkle the surface evenly with half of the measured sugar. The sugar will sink to the bottom of the pan and act as a natural insulation to prevent the milk from burning.

Put the pan over medium-high heat, being care-

CREME ANGLAISE

Yields 2⅓ cups.

2 cups milk
6 tablespoons sugar
6 egg yolks

ful that the flame doesn't climb up the sides of the pan. Without stirring, allow the milk to come to a simmer. It should not boil.

Meanwhile, separate the eggs and put the yolks in one of the reserved mixing bowls. Set aside the whites in a clean container if you intend to use these later. Begin whisking the yolks, then gradually add the remaining sugar and whisk until the yolks begin to ribbon and lighten in color (see photo on p. 43). Don't let the yolks and sugar sit unwhisked. The sugar can "burn" the yolks, resulting in annoying hard specks.

As soon as the milk mixture starts to simmer, take it off the heat and slowly whisk half of the milk mixture into the yolk mixture (see photo on p. 43). You can make the bowl more stable by placing it on a damp kitchen towel. Then whisk the hot milk and yolk mixture back into the saucepan (see photo above). This procedure, known as "tempering," allows the yolks to gradually rise in temperature and prevents shocking the yolks into a scrambled mess.

Here's the crucial part of the whole operation—cooking the custard. The cooking should be done slowly—over a low to medium flame—but when the custard reaches the proper consistency, time is of the essence. A moment too long on the heat can mean curdling. Gas heat is the easiest way to stand watch over this process, but if you have an electric stove,

use two burners: one set on high for the initial simmering of the milk and one on medium for the subsequent cooking.

When cooking the custard, exchange your whisk for a wooden spoon. Using a spoon is important because it doesn't stir up air bubbles, which can prevent you from judging the custard's thickness. Use the spoon to stir the sauce in an exaggerated figure-eight motion. This method ensures that you'll reach both the center and the edges of the pan, which prevents scorching.

As the sauce cooks, it will thicken visibly. When it does, test it by "reading" the wooden spoon (see photo at left). Lift the spoon from the pan, allow the excess sauce to drip off, and draw a line across the paddle with your finger. If the sauce holds the line without running, the cooking is completed and the sauce is ready to be cooled. The cooking can take anywhere from 30 seconds to several minutes, so be patient.

A more precise way to check the custard's readiness is to measure its temperature with a candy thermometer. A fully cooked *crème anglaise* will read between 175° and 180°F. Don't allow the sauce to exceed 185°; at this point, the egg yolks will coagulate and the sauce will curdle (see bottom photo at left).

If this cooking procedure makes you nervous, the mixture can be prepared in a double boiler or a bain-marie (a water bath). This method will slow down the process, and so allows a bit more leeway in cooking time. Regardless of the method used, avoid boiling!

Immediately after the sauce reaches the proper consistency, remove the pan from the heat, pour the sauce into the third mixing bowl, and set the bowl in the ice-water bath to cool it. The mixture must be cooled quickly, or the residual heat in the custard will overcook it.

To cool the sauce quickly, continue to stir the mixture for a minute or two. A bowl of warm milk and egg yolks is a happy breeding area for bacteria. Quick cooling ensures a safer product and prevents spoilage.

Once the custard is thoroughly cooled, strain it through a fine chinois (conical sieve), a sieve, or cheesecloth (rinse the cheesecloth first to remove any traces of bleach). Store the *crème anglaise* in the refrigerator, where it will keep for three to four days. Use common sense when judging freshness; if it smells funny, throw it away.

FLAVORING CREME ANGLAISE

Now that you have the procedure down, you can examine a few flavoring options. The traditional addition to *crème anglaise* is vanilla, and most pastry chefs prefer to use real vanilla bean for its superior flavor and because it can be infused into the milk.

To infuse *crème anglaise* with vanilla, split the bean lengthwise with a paring knife and scrape out the tiny seeds. Add them, and the bean halves, to



A plastic condiment bottle is one of the best decorating tools you can own. It's easy to squeeze a thin, steady line of sauce. Here it's filled with chocolate sauce. When combined with *crème anglaise*, you can "paint" the dessert plates.



Simple effort, elaborate results. Use the tip of a thin, sharp knife to draw an "S" back and forth through the chocolate. A skewer also can be used. In either case, the result is an elegant, feathery pattern.

the pan of milk. Begin the standard *crème anglaise* procedure. Just before the milk comes to a boil, turn off the heat and allow the bean to steep for about ten minutes. Then remove the bean halves and proceed with the basic recipe.

If vanilla beans are not available, vanilla extract is an acceptable substitute. However, since vanilla extract is alcohol based, it should be added to the finished, cooled custard or it will burn off. Rum, bourbon, and liqueurs are other common flavorings and can be added to taste—again, after the custard has fully cooled.

Crème anglaise pairs remarkably well with a wide range of flavors. Herbs, such as mint, lavender, verbena, and thyme, can be steeped in the milk and then strained out, and the resulting custard used to garnish fruit desserts. Use pared strips of orange and lemon zest—free of the white pith, which would give the

Another easy decorating method—Pour a very shallow ring of chocolate sauce on the plate, and “dot” the chocolate using a squeeze bottle filled with *crème anglaise*. Pull the tip of a thin, pointed knife through the center of each dot to create tiny hearts.



The versatility of *crème anglaise*. *Crème anglaise* is the base of the sandwich's mint ice cream. As a sauce, *crème anglaise* helped create the plate's finishing touches.

sauce a bitter flavor—in the same way. Infuse a few spoonfuls of freshly ground coffee in the milk, or add some instant espresso powder to the finished sauce.

Finally, honey and maple syrup can be substituted for some or all of the sugar. Do not, however, simmer these two with the milk. Their acidity could cause the milk to separate and curdle.

MAKING ICE CREAM FROM *CREME ANGLAISE*

If you can make and flavor *crème anglaise*, you can make ice cream. The rest of the process is largely left up to an ice-cream machine; the blade turns the custard to aerate it for texture while it freezes. While I could pour *crème anglaise* into an ice-cream machine, turn it on, and wind up with a decent product, a few simple changes can turn decent into delicious.

The first thing to consider is flavor. A frozen custard won't taste as sweet as a chilled custard, so I begin by adding a little extra sugar to the basic recipe. Likewise, I intensify the flavor of the custard base to compensate for all the air that will be whipped in. Much of the ice

cream's richness is derived from egg yolks, but I further enrich the custard by substituting cream for a portion of the milk. The result is an incredibly smooth ice-cream base that's rich enough to withstand freezing.

I also control the texture by adding a small amount of some complementary alcohol to the ice-cream base before churning. This alcohol will keep the ice cream slightly soft, and since such a small amount is used, the flavor is barely detectable. Also, both the texture and the flavor of the ice cream seem to improve if I allow the base to rest for several hours before churning it. I usually leave mine in the refrigerator overnight.

MAKING A BAVARIAN CREAM FROM *CREME ANGLAISE*

Bavarian cream is a flavored *crème anglaise* with gelatin and lightly beaten cream. I prefer to use a minimum of gelatin and serve the Bavarian cream molded in a dish.

Successful Bavarian creams rely on carefully prepared *crème anglaise*. There should be no detectable bits of yolk or grains of sugar to interrupt the smoothness of the dessert. Likewise, there should be no lumps of unincorporated gelatin. The latter problem can be avoided by carefully following the rules for using powdered gelatin.

I dissolve the gelatin by mixing it with a small amount of liquor or, if no liquor is called for in the recipe, water. In a minute or two, the gelatin will be swollen with the liquid, a process known as “bloom-ing.” At this point, I warm the mixture over a bain-marie until it liquefies.

Once the gelatin is melted, I slowly whisk a small portion of the *crème anglaise* into it. This process allows the gelatin to cool slowly and evenly, and prevents the gelatin lumps. I return this portion to the rest of the *crème anglaise*, chill the mixture until slightly thickened, and fold this mixture into whipped cream. The mixture is then poured into prepared molds and chilled until set.

Remember that in a Bavarian cream, the flavor of the *crème anglaise* is diluted by the whipped cream. Taste the mixture before it has had time to set. If you find that the Bavarian does not have a strong enough flavor, remove a small portion of the mixture and add flavoring (extract or liquor) to it. Then gently fold this portion back into the rest of the mixture.

DECORATING WITH *CREME ANGLAISE*

The same *crème anglaise* used to make these desserts also can serve as their sauce. A sauced, plated dessert lends a note of elegance to a meal, and for a little extra effort you can achieve spectacular results by “painting” the plate with two or more sauces. You can use a chocolate sauce or fruit coulis to add color to the plate and create delicate patterns.

Start by “mirroring” the plate with *crème anglaise*. To do this, spoon a ladle of *crème anglaise* on the plate and use the ladle’s base to spread the sauce into a thin, even circle. Then use a plastic squeeze bottle to place the contrasting sauce (see photo on p. 45).

To create a feathered border, pipe a thin line of contrasting sauce around the *crème anglaise* and pull the tip of a knife back and forth through the line in a zigzag pattern.

To create tiny hearts, begin by squeezing dots of the sauce onto the *crème anglaise*. Run the knife tip through the center of the dot (see photos at left).

A word of caution: to create sauce patterns, it’s essential that the sauces have the same density. For example, if you pair a thin raspberry sauce with a heavier *crème anglaise*, you can only create a runny mess.

FRESH MINT ICE-CREAM SANDWICHES

Makes 12.

2 cups mint leaves (lightly packed), chopped
3 cups milk
1 cup heavy cream, approximately
1 cup sugar
8 egg yolks
2 Tbs. *crème de menthe*
24 chocolate wafer cookies (see recipe below)

Fill a large bowl halfway with ice and set aside.

Combine the mint leaves and milk in a heavy-based saucepan. Bring to a simmer and immediately remove from the heat. Cover and allow to steep for 10 min. Strain the milk through a fine chinois and add enough cream to make 4 cups total liquid. Pour the liquid back into the saucepan and sprinkle the surface with half of the sugar.

Whip the egg yolks with the remaining sugar until they ribbon and lighten in color. Bring the milk and cream to a simmer and temper the yolk mixture by whisking in half of the hot liquid. Whisk this mixture back into the pan and then turn the heat to low. Using a wooden spoon, stir the mixture in a figure-eight pattern until it thickens and coats the back of a spoon, or until the mixture reaches 180°F. Pour the custard into a clean mixing bowl and set the bowl into the ice-water bath. Stir until completely cool, then strain through a fine chinois. Stir in the *crème de menthe* and refrigerate the mixture for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight.

Freeze the mixture in an ice-cream machine according to the manufacturer’s directions. When the ice cream is almost completely frozen, remove it from the machine and spoon it into twelve 3-in. dessert rings, or 3-in. ramekins that have been lined with plastic and chilled. Freeze. To serve, remove the ice cream from the ring and make a sandwich with chocolate wafer cookies. Serve with cocoa sauce and more *crème anglaise* (see section on decorating at left).

CHOCOLATE WAFER COOKIES

Makes 24.

2/3 cup sugar
1 1/2 cups (5 oz.) flour
1/4 cup (1 oz.) cocoa powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. baking soda
12 Tbs. butter
2 egg yolks

Sift the dry ingredients into a bowl. With a fork, work in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Stir in the egg yolks and mix briefly to incorporate. (You can also mix the dough in a food processor, using the pulse button.) Chill the dough and then roll it out between pieces of parchment or waxed paper to 1/8 in. thick. Cut with a small round cutter slightly larger than the ice-cream dessert rings. Bake 15 min. at 350°F, or until the cookies look dry at the edges. The cookies will become crisp as they cool, so don’t overbake them.

COCOA SAUCE

Makes about 1 cup.

1 cup water
3/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup (2 oz.) cocoa powder

Combine the ingredients in a saucepan, bring to a boil, and then simmer slowly to thicken, about 5 min., whisking constantly. Cool. The sauce will thicken with refrigeration.

CAPPUCCINO BAVARIAN CREAM

Makes 8.

3 Tbs. dark rum
1 envelope powdered gelatin
2 cups heavy cream
2 1/3 cups *crème anglaise*, made with 2 Tbs. of espresso powder dissolved in the warm milk

Pour the rum into a small bowl and sprinkle it with the powdered gelatin. Allow about 10 min. for the gelatin to soften, and then melt the gelatin by placing the bowl in a larger container of warm water.

Whip the cream until it forms soft peaks.

Slowly whisk a portion of the *crème anglaise* mixture into the softened gelatin, then whisk the gelatin mixture back into the remaining custard. Set the *crème anglaise* over ice and stir until thickened. Fold in the whipped cream.

Pour the Bavarian cream into 8 cappuccino cups and chill for 8 hours, or until firm. Garnish with a dollop of whipped cream, a sprinkle of cinnamon, and chocolate coffee beans.

Crème anglaise becomes Bavarian cream when combined with whipped cream and a little gelatin. Here, the sumptuous Bavarian has been flavored with espresso powder.



Stephen Durfee is the pastry chef of the Wheatleigh Hotel in Lenox, Massachusetts. During the busy season, he makes a variety of *crème anglaise* every day. ♦



Sweet and tangy at the same time, the peppy flavor of cherry and pear tomatoes tossed in a balsamic dressing makes the tongue tingle (see recipe on p. 51).

Enjoying the Fresh Taste of Tomatoes

Pick them at their peak, handle them well, and freeze them for winter use

BY JESSE COOL

I am constantly surprised at how variable the character of tomatoes can be. Last summer at a tomato tasting in Berkeley, California, I bit into the most sublime tomato I had ever tasted. I excitedly commanded a friend to try one to see if she didn't agree. She didn't. Confused, I took a bite of her tomato. She was right—it was good, but not spectacular, yet it had been sitting in the basket right next to the best tomato in the world.

The cook's challenge is to seek out flavorful tomatoes, use them at their peak, and prepare them in a way that best shows off their fresh flavor. The hardest thing, though, may be to stop using fresh tomatoes when they go out of season. Fortunately, since it's easy to freeze tomatoes, that doesn't mean doing without the great tomato flavor.

SEARCH OUT FLAVORFUL TOMATOES

Everyone's palate is different when it comes to tomatoes. What may be a great tomato to one person could taste terribly boring to another. Some people enjoy tomatoes with high acidity, while others search for a sugary tomato. For me, the finest tomatoes have a keen balance of both sweetness and acidity.

Unless you grow your own, to get good tomatoes, you'll probably need to buy them from a roadside stand or frequent a farmers' market. The tomatoes found in grocery stores are typically bred for uniformity of shape, enticing color, and durability in shipping. Unfortunately, flavor isn't a high priority for mass-market tomato growers. As a cook, however, flavor is my top priority.

When buying tomatoes, feel them for firmness. If you're going to cook them, they can be very soft and almost overripe. On the other hand, if you plan to serve them raw or freeze them, make sure they aren't overly juicy and have no mushy spots. Finally, don't forget to smell the tomatoes. If they're fresh and flavorful, they should emit an enticing, earthy tomato aroma.

My favorite red varieties are full-flavored Early Girl, juicy red Carmello, and bright red Rutgers VF Improved. Delicious colorful varieties I enjoy are orange-colored Golden Jubilee and Orange Ox-heart; Striped Cavern with its yellow and red stripes; large, gold-, fuchsia-, and rose-colored Big Rainbow; and green- and yellow-striped Green Zebra. You can't beat Sweet 100s for a low-acid cherry tomato, though Green Grapes are considered by many to be the tastiest of the small tomatoes.

KEEP TOMATOES OUT OF THE FRIDGE

When you bring fresh tomatoes home, store them out of the refrigerator in baskets or bowls that allow plenty of ventilation. Chilling dulls their flavor, making a tomato that's fruity at room temperature taste boring and uninteresting when cold. If



you're worried about the tomatoes rotting, then refrigerate them, but let them warm to room temperature before serving.

If the tomatoes are still hard or haven't turned their final color, there are two ways to ripen them. Tomatoes ripen from the ethylene gas that they emit naturally. Put the tomatoes either on a sunny windowsill, where the heat of the sun will spur ethylene production, or in a covered container or a paper bag, where the gas that they produce will be trapped and will help ripen the whole batch. Make sure the bag or container has plenty of air holes and check the tomatoes daily, because too much ethylene will make them rot.

COOKING WITH TOMATOES

When cooking with tomatoes, keep in mind that they vary in acidity and sweetness. If a tomato dish seems flat or flavorless, add a bit of acid (such as lemon juice, vinegar, or wine) to balance the flavor. On the other hand, if a tomato dish seems too sharp, play around with brown sugar, honey, maple syrup, balsamic vinegar, or sweet wines to bring out the sweetness typically supplied by the tomato itself.

Pepping up dishes with cherry tomatoes—

Good cherry-size tomatoes are a burst of sweetness and acidity in a small package, and they can be used to good effect in much more than just salads. Try marinating cherry tomatoes for an hour or so at room temperature with chopped scallions or thinly sliced red onions in an herbaceous vinaigrette (see recipe for Marinated Cherry Tomatoes over Warm Provolone Garlic Bread on p. 51). Or toss cherry or tiny pear-shaped tomatoes as a final ingredient

Roast tomatoes in the oven to give them deep, concentrated flavor. Seed the tomatoes first to get rid of extra moisture so they don't steam in their own juices. The crinkly skins come right off.

in vegetable sautés. Try adding a handful of red, yellow, or orange miniatures as the last ingredient to brighten up a bean, lentil, or vegetable soup.

Add the tomatoes at the end—I encourage you to cook tomatoes as little as possible. Their fresh, bright flavor gets lost through long cooking. A new way to approach a slow-cooked sauce is to first stew together the meat, vegetables, and stock to marry their flavors. Rather than add the tomatoes at the beginning, add them during the last half hour of cooking. This will produce an interesting combination of savory flavors with the relatively undisturbed sugar and acid of a fresh tomato. I like to make a quick pasta sauce where the tomatoes are barely cooked (see recipe for Angel Hair Pasta with Just-Warmed Tomato Sauce and Avocado at far right).

Oven roasting for deeper flavor—Long-cooked tomatoes do have their charm, however. Though I was brought up cooking tomatoes slowly on the stovetop, I have recently been lured to my oven and have enjoyed the concentrated flavor of roasted tomatoes (see recipe for Cream of Roasted Tomato Soup at right). To roast tomatoes, heat the oven to 400°F. Cut the tomatoes in half and gently squeeze out the seeds. Rub the tomatoes with olive oil and place them, cut side down, in a shallow roasting pan. Roast them uncovered for about 45 minutes until they get quite soft and their skins blister.

FREEZING TOMATOES AT THEIR PEAK

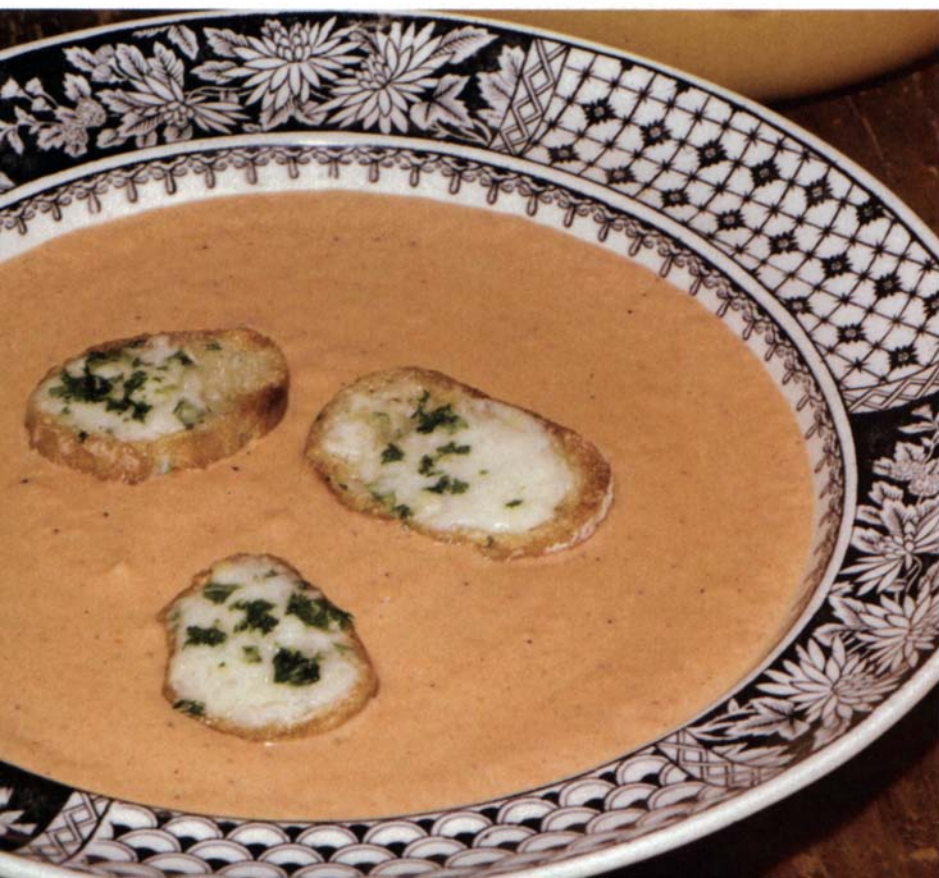
Don't try to buy fresh tomatoes out of season. Greenhouse-grown or imported, they're picked

green and gassed to ripen during shipping. Not only are these tomatoes expensive, but they also lack the natural sugars of a summer tomato and typically have a mealy texture. It's next to impossible to create a good-tasting sauce or salsa from tasteless tomatoes. In the cold of winter, it's much better to do what our foremothers did—use tomatoes that were picked and preserved at the height of the season.

If you have time to can your own tomatoes, I admire you. If (like me) you don't, try freezing them. The best way to freeze tomatoes is to first seed, chop, and cook them on the stove for at least 20 minutes to evaporate as much water as possible. After they've cooled off, put the tomatoes in an airtight container and pop them in the freezer.

If you have some wonderfully ripe tomatoes on hand but don't have time to cook them, then freeze them uncooked. Cover a baking sheet with plastic wrap and spread the tomatoes, either cut into wedges or left whole, on the sheet. Freeze the tomatoes until they're hard, and then put them in a plastic bag and return them to the freezer. When you thaw them to use, the tomatoes get soft and mushy and release a lot of water, but their flavor is still wonderful. Drain them before cooking and reserve the liquid to use as a flavorful stock for soups. Frozen tomatoes will keep in airtight bags for four to six months.

Fennel and fresh tarragon accentuate the sweet flavor of the oven-roasted tomatoes in Cream of Roasted Tomato Soup (see recipe at right). Bubbly, melted cheese on chewy French bread adds a textural contrast to the smooth, puréed soup.



CREAM OF ROASTED TOMATO SOUP WITH PARSLEY CROUTONS

Roasting the tomatoes first gives this soup a deep, sweet flavor. Use ripe but firm tomatoes so they don't get soft too quickly. This soup tastes great with a glass of zinfandel. For a lower-fat version, use milk or more stock instead of cream. Serves four.

FOR THE SOUP:

3 lb. tomatoes
Extra-virgin olive oil
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
8 small shallots, chopped coarse
1 small carrot, chopped coarse
1 small fennel bulb, chopped coarse
2 to 3 cups chicken or vegetable stock
5 sprigs fresh tarragon
5 sprigs fresh parsley
1 cup heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE PARSLEY CROUTONS:

12 thin slices of French bread
Extra-virgin olive oil
2 cloves garlic, cut in half
½ cup shredded Teleme or Muenster cheese
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley

For the soup—Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut the tomatoes in half crosswise and squeeze gently to remove the seeds, scraping them out with your fingers if necessary. Coat the tomatoes with olive oil and put them, cut side down, on a nonstick or foil-lined shallow baking dish. Roast for 35 to 45 min., until the tomatoes are very soft and the skins are dark. Remove them from the oven and let cool. The skins should lift off easily.

Melt the butter in a medium-size saucepan and sauté

the chopped shallots, carrot, and fennel until they're soft, about 12 min. Add 2 cups of stock and the tarragon and parsley. Simmer over low heat for 30 min. Remove the herb sprigs and add the roasted tomatoes. Purée the soup in a blender or food processor. (For a smoother soup, run the soup through a food mill.) Add the cream and return the soup to a simmer. If the soup is still very thick, thin it with more stock. Season with salt and pepper and keep warm over low heat until ready to serve.

For the croutons—Heat oven to 400°. Brush both sides of the bread slices with olive oil and put them on a baking sheet. Rub the top of each slice with garlic and sprinkle on the cheese and parsley. Bake until golden brown, about 5 min.

To serve—Ladle the soup into warm bowls and float two or three parsley croutons on top of each bowl.

ANGEL HAIR PASTA WITH JUST-WARMED TOMATO SAUCE AND AVOCADO

This tomato sauce is quick and easy, a reminder of how good food can be without much effort. Since the dish tastes best warm, not hot, it holds well while you make the rest of the meal. I like this pasta with either a merlot or a big chardonnay. *Serves four.*

1 medium onion, sliced thin
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
¼ to ½ cup red wine
2 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh oregano
¼ to ½ cup coarsely chopped fresh parsley, basil, or cilantro (or a combination)
2 lb. tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped (reserve any juices to add to the sauce)
2 Tbs. capers
½ to 1 habañero or other chile pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped fine
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 lb. dried angel hair (capellini) or other very thin pasta
1 avocado, sliced
Grated aged Asiago cheese or Parmesan cheese for garnish

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for the pasta.

Meanwhile, in a heavy pan, sauté the onion and garlic in the olive oil over medium heat for 5 min. Add the wine and fresh herbs, bring to a simmer, and continue cooking another 3 to 4 min. Turn off the heat and stir in the tomatoes, capers, and chile pepper. Season with salt and pepper. Keep warm until the pasta is cooked.

Cook the pasta in boiling water until tender. Drain the pasta and toss with the warm tomato sauce. Spoon onto a large platter and garnish with slices of avocado and grated Asiago cheese.

MARINATED CHERRY TOMATOES OVER WARM PROVOLONE GARLIC BREAD

If you can find them while they're ripe and flavorful, mix small yellow and green tomato varieties with red cherry tomatoes for a colorful presentation. You can make everything ahead of time and simply do the final toasting of the garlic-and-cheese bread right before serving. My drink of choice with this dish is a cold beer. *Serves four.*

FOR THE MARINATED CHERRY TOMATOES:
2 pints cherry tomatoes, preferably mixed colors
2 scallions (white part only), chopped coarse
¼ cup finely chopped parsley
1 Tbs. finely chopped rosemary



3 cloves garlic, minced
⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE PROVOLONE GARLIC BREAD:

3 to 4 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
3 cloves garlic, minced
4 large, thick slices of crusty bread
4 slices provolone cheese, 1½ oz. each
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

For the tomatoes—In a shallow bowl, mix the tomatoes, scallions, parsley, rosemary, garlic, olive oil, and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Cover the bowl and let the tomatoes marinate at room temperature for at least 1 hour, but preferably 3 to 4 hours. Stir them occasionally so that all the tomatoes are marinated. If the tomatoes are very ripe and marinate long enough, they will crack and burst, allowing their juices to mix deliciously with the marinade.

For the garlic bread—Combine the olive oil and garlic and let the mixture stand for 10 min. so the flavors blend. Meanwhile, heat the broiler. Brush one side of each piece of bread with the garlic and olive oil, and broil them, oiled side up, until lightly browned. Put a slice of provolone and a generous sprinkling of Parmesan on the toasted side of each slice, saving a little Parmesan for garnish. Set the bread aside until you're ready to serve the tomatoes.

Just before serving—Heat up the broiler again. Toast the bread under the broiler until the cheese is bubbly.

To serve, put a piece of the bread in a shallow soup bowl. Spoon about ¾ cup of the tomatoes and marinade on or around the edges of the bread. Garnish with more Parmesan.

Preserve the bright, fresh taste of raw tomatoes by adding them to the dish last. To make a quick sauce for pasta, toss tomatoes and capers with a mixture of onions, garlic, basil, and oregano that has been sautéed in olive oil and wine (see recipe at left).

Jesse Cool applies her passion for tomatoes at her two Northern California restaurants, Flea Street Cafe in Menlo Park and Two Fools in Half Moon Bay. The recipes in this article were adapted from her book, *Tomatoes: A Country Garden Cookbook*, which is available from Collins. ♦

Tame Fiery Italian Brandy by Adding Flavor

An Italian chef tells how to infuse grappa
with fruit, herbs, and even honey

BY LIDIA BASTIANICH

*As your eyes admire, the flavor
matures. While your infused grappa
is improving with age, it can create
a rustic and beautiful display.*



Grappa is a favorite Italian drink. It's distilled from grape pomace—the skins, seeds, and stems that are left after the juice is drawn off for winemaking. Grappa has been drunk in Italy since the Dark Ages, when feudal lords gave pomace to the serfs who worked their land. What the drink lacked in elegance, it made up for in strength. Although grappa's origins are humble, today it is gaining popularity as a sophisticated drink. It's available in many varietal types, and it can even be found in collectors'-quality glass bottles.

Infusing grappa with fruit and herbs has always been a favorite way to savor the potent beverage, and with my method you can easily make a wide variety of flavored grappas at home.

Grappa distillation was pioneered in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a region of Northern Italy, but the drink is popular all over the country. I witnessed grappa-making during my childhood in Busoler, a suburb of Pola on the Istrian Peninsula, in what is now Croatia. Good grappa is made immediately after the grapes have been crushed, when the pomace is still fresh and juicy. The result is a drink of intense flavor and no trace of mustiness, with a pungent bite.

In Friuli, grappa was infused with raisins, *ruta* (a bitter digestive herb), and juniper berries. Today, grappas infused with fruits such as cherries, blueberries, and figs are becoming popular.

You can also use grappa to flavor cakes and cookies by moistening them just before serving. Grappa makes an excellent companion to espresso. You can drink a glass of grappa while sipping espresso, or you can add grappa directly to espresso at a ratio of one tablespoon per cup. This is called *caffè corretto*, or "corrected coffee."

SAVORING A GOOD GLASS OF GRAPPA

Whether you're going to drink infused grappa or use it as a flavoring agent, start off with a grappa you like all by itself. Good grappa is not cheap; prices begin at \$35 to \$40 for a 750ml bottle, and price is usually a fair indicator of quality. If you have a favorite wine, select a grappa made from the same grape varietal. Check the label to find what kind of grape produced the grappa. Many of the grapes are Italian in origin, such as verduzzo, picolit, and moscato; other grapes include merlot and chardonnay.

There are two ways to appreciate grappa's flavor subtleties. Some enjoy drinking it at room temperature, but many people also enjoy drinking grappa after storing the bottle in the freezer, like vodka. In either case, use the appropriate glass. I prefer a tulip-shaped glass so the alcohol can softly carry a con-

centrated essence to the nose and palate.

When drinking a grappa, first enjoy its vibrant scent, redolent of its grape varietal. Then take a sip and let it coat your mouth. Swallow. When the grappa is ingested, partially open your mouth, take a slow breath, and you will feel the flavors come alive. The alcohol's pristine quality and the intense, momentary palate stimulation creates grappa-drinking pleasure.

INFUSING GRAPPA WITH FLAVORS

Conventionally served as an after-dinner drink, grappa is also a wonderful aperitif. Either way, you can increase your enjoyment by infusing the liquid with fruits and herbs because the flavors temper the harshness and bite in grappa. In turn, the fruit is preserved by the alcohol.

Infusing grappa is a simple process. The ingredients are few—grappa, the flavoring elements, and perhaps a little sugar. Quart-size glass canning jars, with hinged or screw-top lids lined with a rubber seal, are good containers. Cheese-cloth and a bowl are the only other necessary equipment. The most important element is time.

The actual process is no more than a simple mixing of flavorings and grappa. Measurements are relatively unimportant when you make an infused grappa. You can make it in any quantity, with as many or few flavoring agents as you like. When using fruit, I like to fill the jar and pour in enough grappa to cover, which produces a very flavorful drink. Other proportions also give good results.

The use of sugar is a matter of taste.

I strongly recommend using sugar with very tart fruits like cherries and raspberries. I like all my infusions sweet, even the herbal ones, so I use one or two tablespoons of sugar, depending on the fruit's sweetness, for every cup of grappa. However, grape-infused grappas require less sugar or none at all, and dried fig grappas never need additional sweetening.

The grappa steeps with the flavorings for anywhere between eight days and four months. Depending on the recipe, this happens in either a well-lit place or a dark place that is warm or at room temperature. By Mediterranean standards, "room temperature" is between 55° and 60°F. Sunny windowsills are best for warm, well-lit places; inside a kitchen cabinet near the stove is good when the grappa needs to be warm and dark. If the recipe requires the grappa to be "room temperature," just make sure it's not in direct sunlight and that the room isn't warmer than 60°.

A progress check is needed every few days as the grappa steeps. Because alcohol is volatile, it may evap-



Infusing grappa couldn't be simpler. After you select your flavoring agent—here, it's black grapes—and put it in a jar, fill the jar with grappa.



The infusing grappa needs little attention beyond a shake to redistribute the flavoring agents. Occasionally, the jar also may need to be topped off with additional grappa, since the seal may not prevent all evaporation.



Strain the grappa after it's fully infused. If you've used fruit and it still looks good, taste it. It will have absorbed the grappa, and can make a heady dessert.

A slim, tulip-shaped glass is best for appreciating grappa's intoxicating aroma. Here, the author enjoys a sample of her cherry grappa.



orate if your seal is not tight and the grappa level may decrease. Top off with fresh grappa as necessary.

After steeping, filter the liquid and age the grappa. To filter, drape a piece of cheesecloth over a bowl and pour in the grappa. Gather the cloth's ends and lift it from the bowl to remove the solids from the grappa. (If you use fruit infusions, and the fruit appears to be in good shape, you can eat it as a heady dessert.) After filtration, you can transfer the grappa to a decorative bottle for display as it continues to age.

You can age infused grappa indefinitely. The following recipes' time periods are the minimum needed to create a properly flavored drink. As the grappa continues to age, it will mellow, lose some of its alcoholic edge, and acquire a "rounder" flavor.

GRAPPA DI LAMPONI

(Raspberry Grappa)

Fill a 1-qt. jar with washed raspberries, a cinnamon stick, 4 cloves, and 4 Tbs. sugar. Pour in grappa to cover. Seal and store in a warm, dark place for three weeks. Filter. Age for a month. Serve with fresh raspberries in each glass.

GRAPPA DI FICHI SECCHI

(Dried Figs in Grappa)

Fill a 2-qt. jar two-thirds full with dried figs and pour in grappa to cover. Seal and steep for two months in a warm, dark place. The figs are delicious, so filtering is unnecessary.

GRAPPA DI CAMOMILLA

(Chamomile Grappa)

Combine 2 cups dried chamomile flowers (available at health-food stores and tea shops), 3 cups grappa, and 3 to

6 Tbs. sugar in a jar. Let it rest in the sun for three weeks, shaking the bottle about twice a week to redistribute the ingredients. Filter.

GRAPPA DI MIELE

(Honey Grappa)

Gently warm 4 cups grappa in a glass container placed in a barely simmering water bath. Watch the heat carefully; you don't want the grappa to evaporate. Add 4 to 8 Tbs. good-quality honey, depending on the preferred sweetness, and stir until completely melted. Bottle and let rest for four months in a cool, dark place, shaking the bottle twice a week. Filter.

GRAPPA DI MENTA PEPERITA

(Peppermint Grappa)

Combine 30 fresh peppermint leaves, 4 to 8 Tbs. sugar, and 4 cups grappa in a jar. Cover and let rest in direct sunlight for five days. Let it steep in a cool, dark place for another three days. Filter and then age for a month.

GRAPPA DI ROSMARINO

(Rosemary Grappa)

Combine ½ cup fresh rosemary leaves and 4 cups grappa in a jar. Cover and steep for four weeks in direct sunlight. Filter. Age at room temperature for two months.

GRAPPA DI CILIEGIE O UVA

(Cherries or Grapes in Grappa)

This recipe is a little different. Instead of filtering, the fruit and grappa are served together, preferably in a brandy snifter. It makes a particularly wonderful after-dinner digestive.

Clip the stems of firm and plump cherries or grapes to ⅛ in. Fill a jar with the fruit, measure in grappa to cover, and add 1 or 2 Tbs. sugar for every cup of grappa. Leave the jar loosely covered, in sunlight, for a week, and then cover tightly and steep for three months, away from strong light.

SOURCES FOR GRAPPA

If you can't find grappa in your local liquor store, you can order it by mail. The following stores usually carry the Gaja, Poli, and Nonino brands, which I think are of good quality.

Foremost Sunset Corners, 8701 Sunset Dr., Miami, FL 33173; 305/271-8492.

Morrell Wine Co., 535 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022; 212/688-9370.

Sam's Wines & Liquors, 1000 W. North Ave., Chicago, IL 60622; 312/664-4394.

Seaholm Wines & Liquors, 134 Wall St., Huntington, NY 11743; 516/427-0031.

Wally's Wine & Spirits, 2107 Westwood Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025; 310/475-0606.

You may also call the following distributor to find nearby retailers of the brands mentioned above.

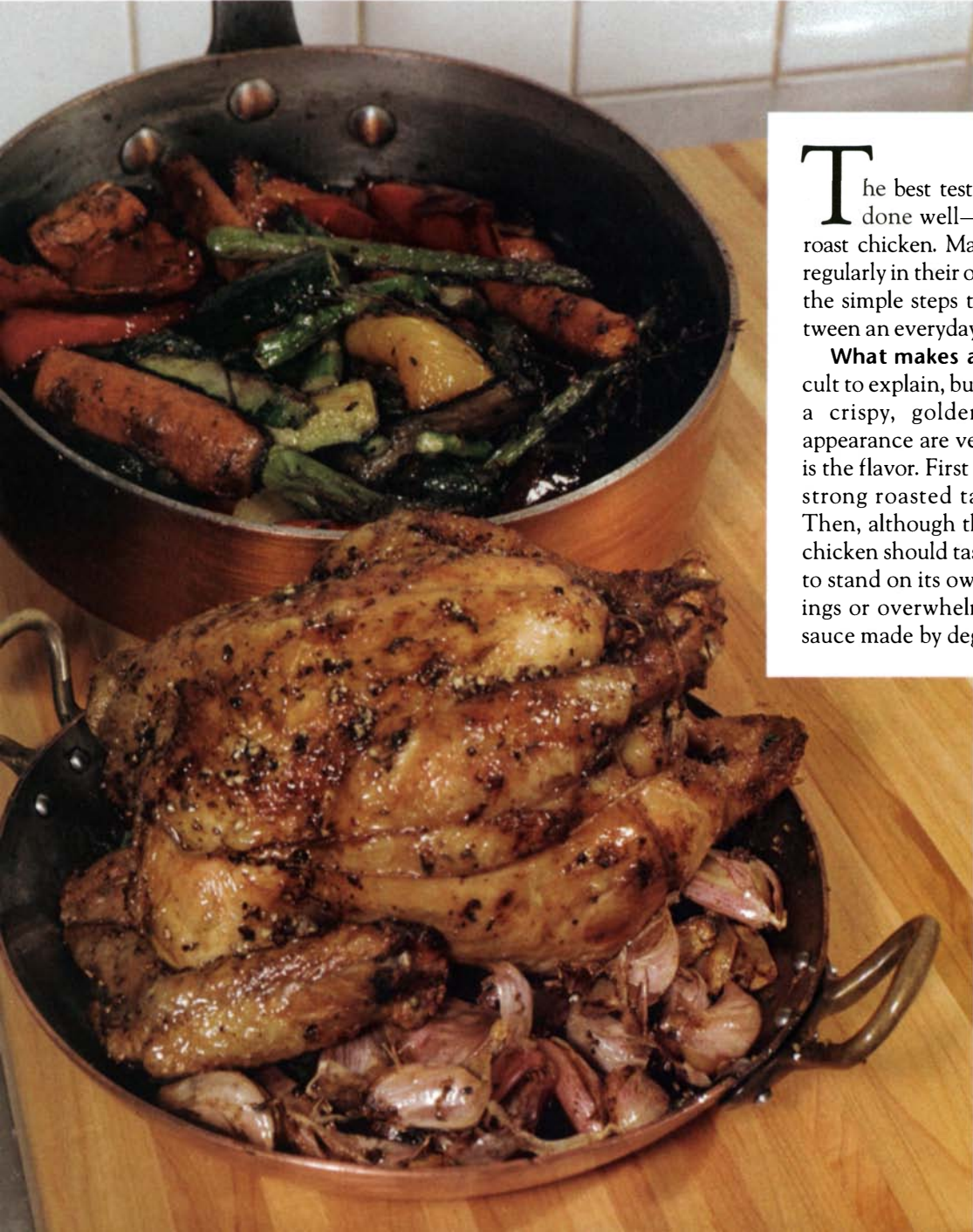
Vinifera Imports, 2190 Smithtown Ave., Ronkonkoma, NY 11779; 516/467-5907.

Lidia Bastianich has been carrying on the family tradition of making and infusing grappa since she was a child. At her restaurants, Felidia and Becco in New York City, she offers more than two dozen kinds of infused grappas. ♦

Roasting a Chicken to Perfection

Simple seasonings and a hot oven yield a bird with superb flavor and juicy texture

BY MITCHEL LONDON



The best test of a good cook is a simple thing done well—say an omelet, or better yet, a roast chicken. Many people prepare roast chicken regularly in their own kitchens, but few are aware of the simple steps that can make the difference between an everyday dish and a great one.

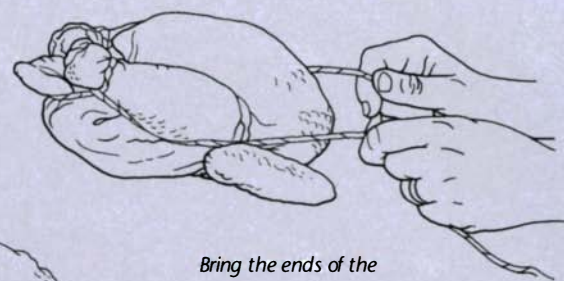
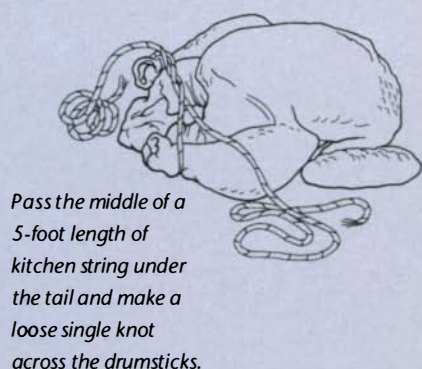
What makes a roast chicken great? It's difficult to explain, but simply put, it's the flavor. While a crispy, golden brown skin and a plump appearance are very nice, the ultimate distinction is the flavor. First of all, the chicken should have a strong roasted taste, rather than a baked one. Then, although this sounds obvious, a great roast chicken should taste like chicken. It should be able to stand on its own, unobscured by strong seasonings or overwhelming sauces, although a simple sauce made by deglazing the roasting pan is a suit-

This chicken will taste terrific.

It has been roasted in a hot oven so the skin is brown and crispy, the meat is juicy, and it has developed a true roast chicken flavor. An assortment of vegetables roasted along with the chicken makes an easy and delicious accompaniment.

How to truss a chicken

The idea is to give the bird a compact shape so it cooks evenly and looks neater when presented whole. Here's my method.—M.L.



able accompaniment (see recipe on p. 59). Last, the meat should be moist and tender. And did I mention flavorful, too?

I got hooked on perfect roast chicken many years ago at L'Ami Louis, the legendary Parisian hole-in-the-wall restaurant where roasting is an art form. But (modesty aside) the best roast chicken I ever ate was one I roasted for myself after cooking a formal dinner for the mayor of New York, which included hors d'oeuvres for 2,000, followed by dinner for 150. You'd think the last thing I'd want to do after serving up such a feast was to cook for myself, but I craved a simple roast chicken. So I did the only thing that any cook worth his salt would do: I turned the Vulcan oven up to 475°F and set about cooking.

This brings me to the three most important things to remember when roasting a chicken—1) temperature, 2) temperature, and 3) temperature. Most cookbooks recommend roasting chicken at 350° to 375°. If you want to bake a cake, you should put your oven on 350°; if you want to bake cookies, 350° is perfect. If you want to *bake your chicken*, 350° is fine too, but if you want to roast it, the oven must be hot: 475°. This goes for roasting anything—poultry, meat, even vegetables.

Food is roasted when it's cooked uncovered in a high, dry heat. By using a very hot oven, you'll ensure that the skin of the chicken is seared, thereby locking the juices and the flavor inside the bird. This guarantees a tender, juicy, and delicious chicken. The other reason to use a high temperature is that it will give a unique roasted flavor to the dish. Each cooking technique—baking, sautéing, grilling, steaming, etc.—flavors food a different way, and this most definitely applies to roasting.

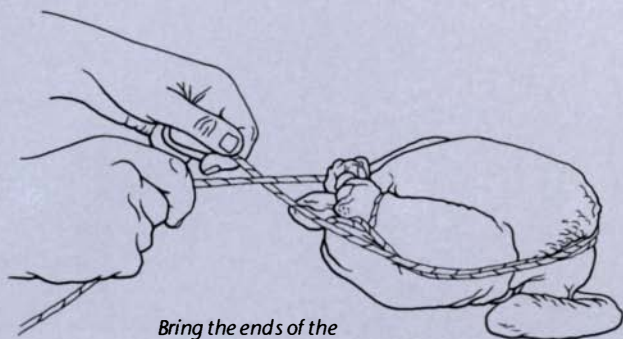


There are two basic rules of roasting—first, use a high initial temperature, and then, after the food has been seared, turn down the heat and roast until done. Second, do not cover the food during roasting. I know that this is often contrary to grandmother's recipes, but it is vital. When you cover food, you're essentially steaming it, not roasting it.

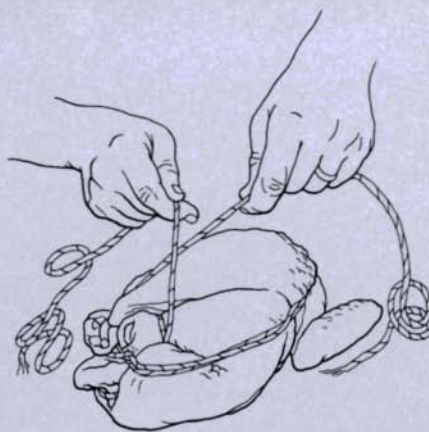
WHICH BIRD?

A 2½- to 3-pound chicken will feed two people generously. "Upscale" chickens, such as poussins (baby chickens) or Cornish game hens, are popular, but they have a lot of small bones and are troublesome to

Simple seasonings bring out the bird's best flavor. London likes lots of freshly cracked black peppercorns and kosher salt, but for a change of pace, he'll put a sprig or two of thyme and rosemary in the chicken's cavity.



Bring the ends of the string back up toward the tail, along the first length of string. Tie a single knot catching the loose skin on either side of the open cavity.



Pull the string over the drumsticks and tie a tight double knot, catching the tip of the breast. The chicken should be a neat shape and the cavity should be tightly closed.

Note: The wings are left unbound and their tips should be secured by tucking them in under themselves.

Illustrations: Stephanie Oser

carve. Free-range chickens are expensive and can have a gamey taste; I don't find them superior to the best fresh chickens, such as Bell and Evan's chickens, I buy from my local market. However, if you don't have good-quality fresh chicken in your area, you might want to try a free-range chicken. If you don't see any for sale at your market or butcher's, check with a natural foods store for leads on where to buy them. If you're planning to use a frozen chicken, you might as well leave the oven off.

SIMPLE TOOLS AND INGREDIENTS

My favorite pan to roast chicken in at home is a heavy, nine-inch, cast-iron skillet. I also use a heavy copper sauté pan. You can use any sturdy pan that's large enough to hold the bird and that can go from stovetop to oven.

You'll need unsalted butter or olive oil, or a combination of butter and oil, according to your own preference. Olive oil imparts its own subtle flavor, and butter helps in browning the skin of the chicken. You'll also need salt and whole black peppercorns. Fresh herbs, if available, are a nice touch, but not necessary. My wife, being Italian, likes to rub the surface of the chicken with garlic and then roast unpeeled cloves of garlic in the same pan with the chicken. However, for a purist like me, crushed black peppercorns and a little salt are all that's needed to bring out the flavor of the chicken. The most important thing you will need is a hot (meaning well-preheated) oven.

PREPARING THE CHICKEN

Rinse the chicken well, and then dry it with paper towels. (Be sure to wash any surfaces that the raw

chicken touches to prevent the possible contamination of other foods with salmonella bacteria, which is often present in raw poultry.) Rub the inside of the chicken with kosher salt. Crush the peppercorns by placing the flat of a chef's knife over them and pounding the knife with your hand. Sprinkle the crushed peppercorns over the outside of the chicken along with some more salt. If you like, put some fresh herbs, such as rosemary or thyme (or both), in the chicken's cavity. It isn't necessary to truss the chicken, and I often don't, but it does give the finished bird a neater appearance, especially if you're going to present it whole at the table. (For trussing instructions, see the box above).

THE ROASTING TECHNIQUE

Thoroughly heat your oven to 475°. Melt two tablespoons butter on the stovetop in a heavy pan that's large enough to hold the chicken. (You can also use olive oil or a combination of oil and butter.) Put the chicken in the pan over medium heat and turn the chicken to coat it. Set the chicken on its side and put the pan on the middle rack of the hot oven for 15 minutes. Turn the chicken to the other side and roast it for another 15 minutes, still at 475°. Finally, lower the oven temperature to 400°, turn the chicken breast side up, and continue roasting for 25 to 30 minutes, basting with pan juices every five minutes.

During cooking, pour off some of the fat that accumulates in the pan. The amount of fat a chicken gives off during roasting varies depending on how much fat was on the bird in the first place. There should be enough fat left in the pan to baste

Identifying chickens

There's a lot to choose from when buying chickens. Here are the types suitable for roasting that are most commonly available in supermarkets or butcher shops.

ROCK CORNISH GAME HEN—

a special breed of small chicken, about 6 weeks old, weighing from 12 ounces to 2 pounds.

BROILER—

a tender chicken, 9 to 12 weeks old, weighing 1½ to 2 pounds.

FRYER—

a tender chicken, 9 to 12 weeks old, weighing 2½ to 3½ pounds.

ROASTER—

a tender chicken, 12 to 20 weeks old, weighing 3½ to 5 pounds.

CAPON—

a tender, castrated male chicken, under 32 weeks old, weighing 5 to 8 pounds.

For golden color and juicy texture, coat the chicken first. Just a few minutes on top of the stove in a mixture of oil and butter coats the bird and promotes browning later. The real cooking takes place in a very hot oven, where the chicken develops its inimitable roasted flavor.

the chicken during the last stage of roasting.

To test for doneness, stick the tip of a knife into the thigh where it meets the leg and press a little. The juices should run clear; if they're still red or pink, cook the bird a little longer. When it's done, remove the chicken from the oven.

Some say that a roasted chicken should sit for five minutes after coming out of the oven before carving so that the bubbling juices can properly settle into all the meat. I'm usually more concerned with getting the chicken on the table as hot as possible, so I rarely let it sit the full five minutes. Also, the delicious aroma of a freshly roasted chicken is too enticing for me to wait.

CARVING AND SERVING THE CHICKEN

The simplest way to carve a chicken is to start with the chicken on its back on a cutting board. Pull each leg and thigh down and away from the body. Slice through the joints where the thighs connect to the body and remove the legs and thighs. Run a sharp knife lengthwise along the breastbone and with the knife, separate the breast meat from the rib cage. I like to leave the wings attached to the breast meat because I like the way it looks. However, they're easily removed by slicing through the joint where they're connected to the breast. When all the chicken parts have been removed, there's no graceful way to get off all the rest of the tidbits, such as the oyster meat, that are still clinging to the carcass. Use your fingers or a fork.

One of my favorite ways to serve roast chicken is to place a breast and a thigh (with the leg) on a bed of steamed spinach on well-heated plates and then drizzle a savory reduced pan-juice sauce over it (see recipe at right).

Another delicious accompaniment to roast chicken is roasted garlic. The unpeeled cloves can



be separated and roasted with the chicken, or a whole head of garlic can be roasted with a little olive oil and Parmesan cheese. To eat, scoop the garlic out of its crisp skin and eat it with the chicken or spread it on thick slices of country bread (see recipe at right).

Roasted vegetables are easy to prepare and are a perfect complement to a succulent roast chicken, especially as you can cook them in the hot oven along with the chicken. Although the assortment of vegetables listed in my recipe is my suggestion for a dish well balanced in color and texture, you can add or substitute a variety of seasonal vegetables, from tomatoes in the summer to turnips and various types



For even cooking, the bird spends fifteen minutes on each side. This helps the skin to get crisp all over and the juices to spread evenly through the meat.

of mushrooms that are more readily available in the fall. I like to serve roast chicken with a French burgundy (made from the pinot noir grape) or a pinot noir from Washington State.

PAN-REDUCED SAUCE

For one chicken.

*Pan drippings from roasted chicken
2 cups homemade or low-salt chicken stock
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Fresh thyme leaves (optional)*

Put the roasting pan with all the drippings on the stove. Tilt it to one side and skim off as much fat (clear liquid) as possible, leaving the brown juices and cooked-on bits in the pan. Start heating the pan over high heat and pour in the chicken stock (the stock should be warm, if possible, to speed the process). With either a wire whisk or a wooden spoon, scrape up any of the drippings that may have stuck to the pan and stir into the mixture. Reduce the mixture by about two-thirds by boiling over high heat. The consistency should be thick enough to lightly coat the back of a tablespoon. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add a pinch of fresh thyme leaves, if you like, and serve with the roast chicken.

STEAMED SPINACH

Serves two to four.

*1 lb. fresh spinach
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste*

Remove the stems from the spinach. Wash the leaves well to remove all grit.

Place the leaves, with water still clinging to them, in a 10-in. frying pan. (They will form a high mound but they'll collapse a lot as they cook.) Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover the pan.

Place the pan over high heat and shake it until the spinach is tender and wilted, about 1 ½ min. Remove from the heat, drain off any excess liquid, and serve immediately.

ROASTED GARLIC

Serves two.

*1 large garlic bulb
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. grated Parmesan cheese*

Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut a slice from the garlic bulb so the tip of each clove is exposed. Press down lightly on the garlic bulb to loosen the skin and put the bulb in a small baking dish. Drizzle olive oil on top and sprinkle with cheese. Roast until soft and pale gold, about 25 to 30 min.

ROASTED VEGETABLES

Serves two to four.

*8 large asparagus spears
2 medium red onions
4 medium carrots
2 medium parsnips
2 medium zucchini
½ lb. shiitake mushrooms
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ Tbs. dried thyme leaves*

Heat the oven to 400°.

Prepare the vegetables—Trim off any woody stems from the asparagus. Peel the onions and cut them into halves. Scrub the carrots and remove the green tops, but do not peel them. Scrub the parsnips, but do not peel them. Cut the zucchini lengthwise into halves. Remove the stems from the mushrooms (reserve the stems to use in a vegetable stock, if you like).

Arrange all the vegetables in a flat pan or a roasting pan in one layer. Brush with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and thyme to taste. Roast until lightly browned, about 15 min. Turn, brush again with olive oil, and roast another 15 min., or until tender when pierced with a knife.

Mitchel London is the owner of Mitchel London Desserts, Inc., a wholesale dessert and pastry company, and a specialty food store, Marché bis, in New York City. Before opening his dessert company, he was the chef to the former mayor of New York, Ed Koch. ♦

Stuffing Peppers Mexican Style

Everything from plain cheese to savory meat and fruit *picadillo* tastes wonderful in *chiles rellenos*

BY SUSAN WHALE



Whenever I bite into a *chile relleno* with its soft, hot filling and sauce-soaked coating, I tell myself that it's been too long since I last made them. Luckily they're on the menu at most Mexican restaurants. Though they are a bit of work to make—the peppers are peeled, seeded, stuffed, coated with an egg batter, fried, and then reheated in a sauce—none of the steps is difficult, and the results are worth the effort. I like to serve them as the starter in a multicourse dinner, feature them in a vegetarian meal, or serve them with rice and tortillas for a satisfying supper.

LOOK FOR POBLANO PEPPERS

The pepper most often used for stuffing here in Mexico is the *chile poblano*, a large, dark green, pointed chile pepper that ranges from very mild to moderately hot. (For suggestions on where to get poblanos, see Sources on p. 63.) But many peppers can be used, not just poblanos. Red and green bell peppers make delicious *chile rellenos* (literally “stuffed peppers”), though the flavor will not be as complex as with poblanos.

Make sure the peppers are fresh, have bright, shiny skins, and feel firm to the touch. Old chiles with dull, wrinkled skin and soft flesh disintegrate too easily during roasting and peeling. Straight peppers without deep creases are the easiest to peel. If you're using bell peppers, choose small to medium-size ones, because large peppers will be overwhelmingly big once they're filled, battered, and fried.

PEELING OFF THE TOUGH SKIN

Peeling the fresh peppers isn't difficult if they're first charred and sweated. You must peel poblano peppers because their tough skin is no fun to eat, but this step is optional with thinner-skinned bell peppers. When charring peppers, get the pepper as close to a flame as possible so that the skin blisters and loosens quickly before the flesh overcooks and disintegrates. I like to char them right on a gas burner where I can keep an eye on them and turn them as needed (see photo at right). You can char them under a broiler instead, but I find it takes longer and the flesh is too soft by the time the skin blisters. If you have an electric stove, put the peppers on a rack right over the burner (a small cake-cooling rack works well). Or, if you want to avoid making a mess on your stove, try blackening the peppers outside on a grill. No matter where you blacken the peppers, turn them frequently with a

As pleasing to the mouth as it is colorful, chile en nogada combines the slight heat of a poblano chile pepper, the sweet creaminess of walnut sauce, the tang of the picadillo filling, and the juicy crunch of the pomegranate-seed garnish.

Photo: Suzanne Roman

pair of tongs so that the skins blister evenly.

As soon as each pepper is charred, put it in a plastic bag along with the other blistered peppers. Twist the bag shut and drape a wet cloth over the bag. Let the peppers sweat for 10 to 15 minutes, and then wash the skins off in a bowl of water or under a running tap. If the skins have been well blistered, they'll come off easily.

After you've peeled the peppers, make a small slit along the length of the pepper just big enough to allow you to snip out the ball of seeds near the stem and remove the thick, whitish veins from the inner walls of the pepper (see photo at right).

Peeled and deveined peppers freeze very well, so it's worth buying large quantities of peppers when they're at their best, peeling the whole batch, and storing them in the freezer to have ready when you want to make *chiles rellenos*. Freeze them flat with a

of these fillings for additional flavor and to help bind the mixture together so that it doesn't fall out of the chile during frying, but it isn't necessary.

Filling the peppers goes quite quickly. First stick a one- to two-ounce chunk of cheese or a spoonful of the filling into the pepper and close the opening in the pepper. Resist the urge to pack in a lot of filling, because when the pepper's battered and cooked, it will be too much for one person to eat.

Until you've had a bit of practice and can hold the stuffed pepper together with your fingers while you dip and fry it, it helps to fasten the pepper closed with a toothpick. Overlap the cut edges and stick the toothpick through both pieces of flesh. Remember to remove the pick after frying.

The next step is to coat the peppers with flour (see photo on p. 62). I like to season the flour with salt, pepper, and a little powdered chicken bouillon.



Charring peppers over a flame loosens the tough skin. After the poblano peppers are fully charred, they're put in a plastic bag to sweat for 15 minutes. The blackened skin will slip right off.

The pepper needs some flesh near the stem to keep its round shape, so don't cut too close to the stem when removing the seeds.



piece of plastic wrap between each layer so that you can take them out as you need them.

STUFFING THE PEPPERS

Cheese makes a wonderful stuffing for *chiles rellenos*; it's what you'll find most often on menus at Mexican restaurants. Any soft, mild-flavored cheese will do. My two favorite Mexican cheeses to use are *panela* and *manchego*. Cheeses more readily available in the United States that would work well are mozzarella, Monterey Jack, and Gouda.

While cheese is the most common filling in *chiles rellenos*, the possibilities are endless. I like to stuff peppers with sweet-and-sour *picadillo* (recipe on p. 62) and with a mixture of sautéed zucchini, mushrooms, garbanzos, corn, and tomatoes. Other fillings I like are puréed potatoes, refried beans, tuna fish, sardines, risotto, leftover chicken, and sautéed squash blossoms. You can add grated cheese to any

A half cup of flour is plenty for six peppers. Dip each stuffed pepper into the flour and pat the pepper to make sure the flour sticks. I find it's easiest to stuff a pepper and immediately cover it with flour while I still have it in my hands.

COATING IN BATTER AND FRYING

When the peppers are stuffed and coated with flour, you'll dip them in a simple batter made only from eggs and then fry them. Since the whipped egg whites in the batter quickly fall back to a liquid state, get everything ready for frying the peppers before you begin to make the batter. Put about an inch and a half of oil into a wide, shallow saucepan or a frying pan. Get out two spatulas or spoons to turn the peppers. A deep-fat fryer will work as long as it's wide enough to reach in with the two spatulas to turn the peppers over. Set a plate covered with several sheets of paper towels near the stove



A coating of flour helps the egg batter stick to the stuffed peppers. These peppers are stuffed with a mixture of meat and fruit called picadillo.

A generous battering and quick frying make for a light, non-greasy coating for the stuffed peppers.

to drain the fried peppers. Heat the oil slowly over moderate heat.

When these items are ready, turn to the eggs. Four large eggs are ample to coat six medium chiles. Carefully separate the whites from the yolks. Lightly whisk the yolks and set them aside. Beat the whites in a clean, dry bowl with a clean whisk or electric mixer until the whites stand up in peaks and stick to the whisk or beaters. Gently fold the yolks into the whites with a fork or a whisk. The mixture should be an even, pale yellow color and have a meringue consistency.

Check to see that the oil is hot enough for frying the peppers by dropping a bit of the egg batter into it. If it sizzles and quickly turns brown, the oil is ready.

Take the peppers one at a time and shake off any excess flour. Immerse the pepper in the egg batter and turn it until it's completely coated (see photo above right). Carefully lay it in the hot oil. If the egg batter doesn't brown in 15 to 20 seconds, turn up the heat a bit, because the longer the pepper sits in the oil, the more grease it will absorb. While the egg batter is browning underneath, splash or spoon oil on the top of the pepper to help set the coating that hasn't cooked yet. Once the bottom is brown, partially turn the pepper with the two spoons or spatulas and continue frying until the pepper is evenly browned on all sides (see photo on opposite page). Remove the peppers from the oil and drain them on the paper towels. It's easier to fry the peppers with two people: one coating and the other frying. If you're working alone, be patient and fry the peppers one by one so that you can turn them frequently to help them keep their shape.

After the chiles have been coated and fried, they are traditionally served covered with a thin tomato sauce (see recipe at right) and accompanied by Mexican rice and tortillas. Since the egg coating isn't meant to be crunchy, the fried peppers hold well for several hours before serving. Reheat the peppers by simmering them in the sauce for a couple of minutes



or arranging the chiles in a microwaveable dish, pouring the hot sauce over them, and heating them in a microwave on high for about four minutes.

Up until now, I've only talked about *chiles rellenos* that are coated with egg, fried, and served hot, but *chiles rellenos* don't have to be fried and can be served cold. In fact, if your peppers fall apart when you peel them, you're better off not cooking them further. Fill them with something that's tasty cold, such as tuna or chicken salad, and serve them on a bed of lettuce covered with a cream, yogurt, or vinaigrette dressing.

A special type of *chiles rellenos* called *chiles en nogada* is stuffed with *picadillo* and covered with a walnut cream sauce (recipes at below and at right). It can be made with or without the batter coating. Garnished with red pomegranate seeds and green parsley, *chiles en nogada* have the colors of the Mexican flag and are great to serve on Mexico's Independence Day, the sixteenth of September (see photo on p. 60).

PICADILLO

(Meat and fruit filling)

Fruits, nuts, and tomatoes work together to give this meat filling a sweet-and-sour flavor. To make delicious *Chiles en Nogada*, stuff peppers with *picadillo* and cover them with walnut cream sauce. Enough to stuff 8 to 10 peppers.

½ cup sliced almonds or chopped walnuts

1 small onion, chopped fine

2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 tsp. oil

1 lb. ground pork (or half pork and half beef)



1½ cups canned crushed tomatoes, with juice
1½ tsp. powdered chicken bouillon or 1 bouillon cube
½ tsp. oregano
¼ tsp. cinnamon
1 bay leaf
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup water
½ cup chopped or crushed canned pineapple, drained
1 small banana, mashed
½ cup raisins
Sugar
Cider vinegar

Toast the almonds or walnuts on a baking sheet in a 350°F oven until they emit a nutty aroma, about 5 min.

In a large frying pan or saucepan, sauté the onion and garlic in the oil until soft but not browned. Crumble in the ground meat and cook until the meat begins to lose its pink color. Stir in the crushed tomatoes and season with chicken bouillon, oregano, cinnamon, bay leaf, pepper, and salt if necessary. Add the water, turn down the heat, and simmer for 15 to 20 min. (stirring occasionally to prevent sticking), until the mixture is still moist but not runny. Remove from the heat, take out the bay leaf, and stir in the nuts, pineapple, banana, and raisins. Set the mixture aside until cool.

Taste the mixture. To bring out the flavor of the fruits and tomatoes, add ½ tsp. sugar and ½ tsp. cider vinegar. Taste again and add a little more sugar or vinegar, if necessary.

WALNUT CREAM SAUCE

To complete the *chiles en nogada*, spoon cool walnut cream sauce on the peppers right before serving and garnish with pomegranate seeds and sprigs of parsley. This sauce uses a homemade thick cream, similar to Mexican *crema espesa*, that you'll need to start the day before. (You can also use store-bought *crème fraîche*.) Traditionally, the brown skins are peeled off the walnuts to make this sauce creamy white, but I put up with some brown specks in the sauce and use the walnuts unpeeled. *Makes 2½ cups.*

1 cup shelled walnuts
2 cups thick cream (see recipe above right) or crème fraîche
1 to 2 Tbs. sherry (optional)
½ tsp. salt

Toast the walnuts on a baking sheet in a 350° oven for about 5 min. Grind them fine in a blender or food processor. Stir in the cream, sherry, and salt. Thin with a little milk, if necessary.

Keep the chiles from flattening out during frying by turning them frequently.

A great do-ahead meal, chiles rellenos reheat nicely in a microwave or on the stove.



THICK CREAM

Makes about 2 cups.

1½ cups heavy cream
¾ cup buttermilk

Take the chill off the cream by heating it slightly in a saucepan or in the microwave, but keep it below 100°. Stir in the buttermilk and put the cream in a jar or bowl. Partially cover and let stand in a warm spot overnight (at least 8 hours) to thicken. Refrigerate until needed.

TOMATO SAUCE

This thin, mild tomato sauce is a good accompaniment to any cheese-filled *chile relleno*. Enough for 6 to 8 chiles.

1 Tbs. oil
½ small onion, minced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1½ cups water or chicken stock
1 cup tomato purée
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a saucepan and sauté the onion and garlic until translucent. Add the water or chicken stock and the tomato purée. Season the sauce with salt and pepper and simmer for 10 min.

SOURCES FOR POBLANO PEPPERS

Poblano peppers grown in the U.S. are in season August and September, while poblanos from Mexico are available most of the year. If your market doesn't carry them, see if the produce manager can order some for you. You can order fresh or frozen poblanos from the following stores.

Melissa's by Mail, PO Box 21127, Los Angeles, CA 90021; 800/468-7111. (Fresh poblanos.)

Chile La Isla, PO Box 1379, Fabens, TX 79838; 800/895-4603. (Roasted and individually frozen.)

Don Alfonso Foods, PO Box 201988, Austin, TX 78720; 800/456-6100. (Roasted and frozen in 5-pound blocks.)

Chiles rellenos weren't in the curriculum at the English hotel school where Susan Whale was an instructor. They've become part of her repertoire during the sixteen years that she's lived in Cuernavaca, Mexico, where she is a caterer and cooking teacher. ♦

Cobblers and Grunts Showcase Summer Fruits

Choose between toppings of cake, biscuit, or dumplings to contrast with juicy baked fruits

BY JIM DODGE



Keep the dough in motion. This biscuit-type cobbler dough is soft, so keep it moving or it will stick to the work surface. The author dusts everything with plenty of flour. After every few strokes of the pin, he slips his fingers underneath the circle of dough and slides it around the board to make sure it isn't sticking.

For me, the most exciting thing about summer is the abundance of ripe berries and fruits sold from rustic farm stands at the edges of gardens or orchards. When hand-picked at the peak of their season, these fruits will have their fullest flavor and best textures. The simple desserts called cobblers and grunts are perfect for showcasing the special characteristics of summer fruits, such as the gentle but tart spiciness of small native blueberries or the rosiness of a strawberry that's ripe to

the center and sweetly perfumed.

Over my 20 years as a pastry chef and teacher, I've decided that the best desserts are those that pay tribute to perfect ingredients. By this, I mean desserts in which the balance of all the components brings out the best qualities of the starring ingredient—in this case, the luscious summer fruits. So why are homey cobblers and grunts such good examples of a harmoniously balanced dessert? If I define the terms first, it will be easier to understand.

A COBBLER HAS A BAKED TOPPING

A cobbler is a fruit dessert that is baked in an oven-proof dish that's shallow, but never less than 1½ inches deep. A cobbler is constructed with a layer of fruit topped with a cake batter or a biscuit-like dough. The bottom of the dish is never lined with batter or dough: this would be more of a baked fruit pudding or a deep-dish pie. Nor is a cobbler ever covered with a lid during baking, as this would steam the topping and prevent it from browning. Browning gives the topping a slightly toasted caramel flavor, an important subtlety to the overall flavor of the dish.

The correct ratio of topping to fruit is crucial to a good cobbler (and to a grunt, too). The idea of both desserts is to showcase the fruit. The topping should contrast with the filling's bright, sweet flavor and juicy texture, thereby enhancing those qualities. If the topping is too thick, it overwhelms the fruit, making the topping the focal point of the dessert and the fruit secondary—the fruit becomes more like a sauce for the topping.

Almost any fruit will be delicious in a cobbler, provided that it's flavorful and ripe, but good choices include juicy fruits like apples, peaches, cherries, and berries. Fruits that don't give off a lot of juice, like figs and bananas, will produce a dry, uninteresting cobbler, while really juicy fruit, like melons and citrus, will make the dish too wet and soggy.

The fruit is always mixed with a little sugar, which serves several purposes. First, sugar helps to bring out the flavor of the fruit. Sugar also dissolves in the natural fruit juices, which are released in the heat of the oven. This syrupy liquid keeps the fruit moist while baking. While sugar is an important ingredient, too much will be overbearing and will mask the natural sweet-tart flavor of the fruit. I add less than what's called for in traditional recipes.

As with anything that you bake, it's important not to overbake your cobbler. You may end up with a mushy or dry filling and a hard, bitter topping. It's easy to tell when your cobbler is baked enough. First, notice whether the topping is golden brown all over. Next, check to see that the fruit juices have been bubbling up around the edges of the topping for about 10 minutes, becoming shiny and slightly thickened. This tells you the crust is cooked and the fruit is tender. You can double-check the cobbler with a long toothpick, pushing it through the topping and the fruit. The pick should glide into the fruit and, when removed, it should be dry and free of any raw batter.

A GRUNT HAS A STEAMED TOPPING

A grunt is a baked fruit stew with a topping of steamed dumplings. It is baked in an ovenproof casserole dish with a snug-fitting lid. The lid allows

steam from the filling to build up, which cooks the dumplings. An unusual and important ingredient in a grunt is water, added to the filling. A significant amount of water is needed in a grunt filling in order to create enough steam to cook the dumplings. You might think that the water would dilute the flavor of the fruit, but combined with sugar, it becomes a syrup that mixes with the natural fruit juices. The grunt filling is first cooked in the oven. Once the fruit is tender and hot, the dumplings are quickly dropped on top; the dish is then covered and returned to the oven to be steamed. This steaming helps to raise the dumplings and keeps them light and tender. Tough dumplings are the result of an overmixed dumpling dough or of not enough steam. Don't remove the casserole lid for 15 minutes once you've added the dumplings or they'll collapse and become tight and hard.



Folding the dough makes it easy to arrange on the fruit. Once you've rolled it so it fits your dish, fold the dough in half, gingerly lift it, and place it on the fruit. Flip the folded dough open and tuck the edges loosely into the fruit.

I'm giving a recipe for blueberry grunt on p. 67, but you can substitute almost any fruit for the berries. The only major change in the recipe would be the amount of cooking required to tenderize the fruit. If you were to substitute pears or any other firm fruit, then expect to increase the cooking time. Use a toothpick to test the fruit for doneness; it should glide easily into the fruit. Try giving your dumplings a different dimension of flavor by adding some chopped herbs, like basil, or a little grated lemon or orange peel. But don't use a heavy hand with extra flavors—remember, you want the topping to enhance the flavor of the fruit, not compete with it.

Both cobblers and grunts can be baked ahead and reheated before serving. It's best to serve both desserts fairly warm, when they reveal their fullest flavors. But don't go directly from the oven to the table. Fifteen minutes of cooling will bring the



The blackberry cobbler gets a cake-like topping. The author uses two spoons to distribute dollops of batter over the surface of the fruit. Then he spreads the dollops with a spatula to form an even layer.

dessert to the right temperature and allow the juices to thicken slightly. I always prefer to serve these desserts in soup plates. Their defined bowl shape contains the juices. This makes the presentation neat, and also makes the dessert easy to eat with a spoon. Present the dessert whole in the dish it was baked in. Plating these desserts in front of your family and guests will only whet their appetites. Cobblers and grunts are happily eaten plain, or topped with a variety of accents such as ice cream, softly whipped cream, sour cream, or vanilla yogurt.

BLACKBERRY LEMON COBBLER

Serves six to eight.

6 cups blackberries
½ cup sugar
1 tsp. grated lemon peel
1¼ cups (5 oz.) all-purpose flour

1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
1 large egg
⅓ cup milk
6 Tbs. unsalted butter

Heat oven to 375°F. Wash the berries in a bowl of cold water, drain well, and dry on a towel. In a medium bowl, toss the berries with ¼ cup of the sugar and the lemon peel until evenly blended. Spoon the fruit mixture into a 2-qt. baking dish, about 2 in. deep. Spread the fruit evenly in the dish with the back of a spoon.

In a medium bowl, blend together the flour, baking powder, and salt. In a small bowl, beat the egg and the remaining ¼ cup sugar until well blended. Stir the milk into the egg mixture. Melt the butter in a small saucepan or a microwave without browning it. Stir the melted butter into the milk mixture and then pour the liquid into the flour. Mix with a fork only until the batter comes together. Be careful not to overmix the batter, as this might overdevelop the gluten in the flour and make the batter tough.



Homey, but not dowdy. Cobblers are unfussy desserts with a simple but appealing aspect. Easy to prepare ahead, a cobbler is a natural choice for a dinner party menu.



Cobblers are delicious with almost any fruit. Just make sure the fruit isn't too dry (figs, bananas) or too wet (citrus fruit, melon). Here, whole raspberries are tossed with apple wedges and grated orange zest. As the fruit cooks, the juice soaks into the crisp almond topping.

Using two large soup spoons, drop spoonfuls of batter evenly over the surface of the fruit, starting in the middle. With a spoon or a spatula, spread the batter so that it's about ¼ in. thick. Bake on the lowest rack of your oven for 35 to 45 min. Remove from the oven and cool on a rack for about 15 min. before serving.

APPLE ALMOND COBBLER

Serves six to eight.

½ cup sliced almonds
6 medium apples (McIntosh, Empire, or other crisp, slightly tart apple)
½ cup sugar
1 cup (4 oz.) all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
6 Tbs. unsalted butter
⅓ cup milk

Heat the oven to 300°. Spread the almonds on a baking sheet in a single layer and bake until golden brown, 12 to 15 min. (Usually when you can smell the aroma of the almonds, they're done.) Remove them from the oven and set aside to cool completely. Increase the oven temperature to 350°.

Peel and core the apples. Cut each apple into 8 wedges. In a medium bowl, toss the apples with ¼ cup sugar. Pile the apples into a 2-qt. baking dish that's about 2 in. deep. Spread the apples into an even layer in the pan.

In the work bowl of a food processor, blend the flour, the remaining ¼ cup sugar, baking powder, and salt. Cut the butter into ½-in. pieces. Add the butter to the flour and process until the butter is completely blended in and the mixture has the texture of a coarse meal. Transfer into a bowl and add the almonds. Blend with a spoon until the almonds are evenly distributed. Add the milk and blend with a spoon or spatula just until the milk is absorbed. Dust the dough lightly with a little more flour. Press the dough into the bowl to compress it a little and then gather it into a ball. Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface into a shape that will cover the fruit, using a little more flour if needed. Gently lift the dough and lay it over the fruit, tucking in the

edges loosely. Bake on the lowest rack in your oven for 45 to 50 min., or until the apples are tender and the topping is golden brown. Cool the cobbler on a rack for about 15 min. before serving.

BLUEBERRY GRUNT

Serves six to eight.

2 pints blueberries
1 cup water
1 cup sugar
1½ cups (6 oz.) all-purpose flour
2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. salt
4 Tbs. unsalted butter
1 cup milk

Heat the oven to 350°. Wash the berries in a bowl of cold water, drain well, and remove any stems. In a 2½- to 3-qt. covered casserole, stir together the water and sugar. Add the berries and cover with the lid. Bake for 30 min. or until the filling gives off a little steam.

Meanwhile, prepare the dumplings. Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt together into a medium bowl. In a small saucepan or a microwave, melt the butter without browning it. Stir the butter into the milk and then stir the milk mixture into the flour, using a fork. Mix the batter only until the milk is absorbed. The batter will look undermixed, but this is how it should be.

When the fruit is ready, remove the lid and drop large soup spoon-size dumplings on top of the fruit to cover it entirely. The dumplings will sink a little. Cover with the lid and continue baking for 15 min. Don't remove the lid until the end of the cooking time. Let the grunt stand on a rack, uncovered, for 15 min. before serving.

Jim Dodge is the senior vice-president of the New England Culinary Institute and part owner of a Hong Kong restaurant, The American Pie. He was formerly the pastry chef of the Stamford Court Hotel in San Francisco, and is the author of two books on pastry desserts. ♦



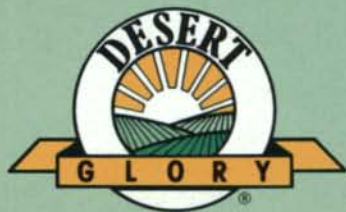
For fluffy dumplings, don't peek during baking. The dumplings puff and bake in the steam from the fruit, so use a baking dish with a tight-fitting lid. Don't lift the lid while the dumplings are baking or the steam will escape and the dumplings will deflate.



FRESH ON THE VINE... FROM OUR HOUSE TO YOUR HOUSE.

Greenhouse grown in rich sandy soil, our tomatoes are sweeter than regular tomatoes and their extended shelf life makes for longer lasting enjoyment. Desert Glory's Cocktail Tomatoes are harvested by hand, carefully packaged and then shipped "fresh on the vine" to you.

60oz. Box
\$19⁹⁹ Delivered!
TOLL FREE 1-800-44SALAD



Desert Glory, P. O. Box 453, Devine, Texas 78016

Tomatoes shown
larger than actual size.

BASICS

In this department, experts present foundation recipes, define culinary terms, and describe basic preparation and cooking techniques. Readers are invited to send us pieces on their best methods of work.

Steeling Knives



For beginners, it's best to hold the steel steady and only move the knife.

I learned to use a steel as part of my first job, helping at the sandwich counter of a large cafeteria. Aside from the attention that comes from brandishing a long knife and a long steel rod, steeling is important to master because it helps to keep your knives sharp and therefore helps you to cook better.

The trick with steeling is to hold the steel steady and practice the knife movements alone. Grab the steel like a dagger in your left hand (or your right if you're left-handed) and plant the point straight down on your countertop squarely in front of you. With the knife in your other hand, run the blade down one side and then the other with a clear view of the angle you're aiming for between the knife and the steel (about 25°). With the steel fixed, you can concentrate on the moving component. Start with the point of the knife tilted slightly upward, the steel in contact with the edge down near the hilt. Check the angle, lock your wrist, and draw the knife toward you, at the same time sliding it down



Use your body as a brace to steady the arm holding the steel. Again, you only need to move the knife.

the steel (see photo at left). Do this a few times, memorizing the angle between knife and steel (think about the angle the hands of a clock make at three minutes after twelve), before changing to the other side and duplicating the angle there (at three minutes before twelve). Use moderate pressure: there's no need to grind the knife into the steel, but press hard enough to do something. If you listen closely, you'll hear the edge become smooth.

With practice, your movements will become more fluid, and you can work on alternating strokes from side to side. Next, you can lift the steel from the countertop and start developing control in the air. The best way to ease the transition is to steady the steel again, this time by bracing your arm against your side. Hold the steel's handle as though you were shaking hands with it and point it straight away from you.

The grip on the knife is similar, the back (unsharpened) edge toward your thumb (see photo above). In fact, you can extend your thumb along the back edge of the knife and gain a sure sense of its angle as you adjust it by rotating your wrist. Begin with the knife on the top surface of the steel, up near the hilt. Feel for the 25° angle, lock your wrist, and stroke the knife across the steel, moving the knife in an arc away from you and to the right. Keep firm contact between the two utensils, and the knife should leave the steel near the tip of each. Now bring the knife back and position it on the underside of the steel, again near the hilt, and rotate your wrist to find that 25° angle. Lock your wrist and firmly stroke the knife again, outward in an arc.

Back and forth, top side and underside, the advantage is that stable steel—only the knife is moving.

When you've achieved some grace, go for panache: try moving your left hand in the same way you're moving your right, matching the wrist adjustments as well as the arcing movements.

Don't forget to use the knife once in a while. You'll be pleased to find it will slice tomatoes without juicing them.

—Rick Mastelli, editor-in-chief, *American Woodturner*, and avid tool sharpener

Nutrition Math

Learning a few simple mathematical formulas can help you to track and evaluate the amount of fat in your diet.

First decide on your target average daily calorie intake for your ideal weight. Then decide on a realistic fat limit—the portion of those daily calories that comes from fat. Today, health professionals think the “healthy” range is between 10% and 30%. The simple formula to calculate the percentage of calories from fat (from an individual dish or from your total diet) is that one gram of fat equals nine calories. Multiply your average caloric intake by the chosen percentage of fat allowance and then divide by nine. The result is your maximum total grams of fat per day.

Example:

$$\begin{aligned} &1800 \text{ calories (daily intake)} \times .20 \\ & \text{(20\% calories from fat)} = 360 \text{ calories} \\ & \div 9 \text{ (calories per gram of fat)} = \\ & 40 \text{ grams of fat per day} \end{aligned}$$

To calculate the percentage of calories from fat in a particular food, multiply the grams of fat by nine. Divide this number by the total calories in the food.

Example:

$$\begin{aligned} &3 \text{ oz. (84 grams) of scallops have} \\ & 88 \text{ calories and 1 gram of fat} \\ & 1 \text{ gram fat} \times 9 \\ & \text{(there are 9 calories per gram of fat)} = \\ & 9 \text{ calories from fat} \\ & 9 \text{ calories from fat} \div 88 \text{ total calories} = \\ & \text{approximately 10\% calories from fat} \end{aligned}$$

Two sources that list the nutritive values of many foods are *Bow's and Church's Values of Portions Commonly Used* (Jean

A.T. Pennington, editor. Lippencott, 1993. ISBN 0-397-55087-1) and *Nutritive Value of Foods*, U.S. Government Printing Office (order number 001-000-04575-0; to order, call 202/783-3238).

Don't confuse "percentage fat-free" claims (often seen on food packaging) with percentage of calories from fat. Scallops are 99% fat free, but they still get 10% of their calories from fat. Skinless, roasted chicken breast is 95.5% fat free, but it still gets 23% of its calories from fat. Even 2% milk gets one-third of its calories from fat.

But the percentage of calories from fat in a single dish doesn't tell the whole nutritional story. Even if a food has a high percentage of calories from fat, it may still be an excellent, nutrient-dense food that's a good choice. A one-ounce serving of oatmeal has 14% of calories from fat, and cornmeal has 9% (but watch out, tortilla chips have 51% calories from fat). A healthy salad full of nutritious leafy greens may appear to have a high percentage of calories from fat because it is dressed with a moderate amount of vinaigrette. The total calorie count for the greens and vegetables is so low that even a little dressing will make the percentage look too high for comfort.

Your bottom line should be the *total* grams of fat you eat per day—does this match your goal of overall percentage of calories from fat? Be sure to count the fat found naturally in foods like cheese, avocados, nuts, and olives, as well as the added fat from cooking and table spreads. And relax, it's the average fat intake over several days that counts. An occasional high-fat treat or meal isn't going to keep you from attaining your healthy goal.

—Susan Asanovic, M.S.R.D., president of *La Table dans le Bon Sens*, food and nutrition consultants, Wilton, Connecticut

Peeling and Seeding Tomatoes

For certain dishes, tomatoes really should be peeled, or peeled and seeded, before being used. This is usually the case in a cooked dish, where the tomato skin will separate from the flesh and curl up, which can detract from the look of the dish and can be unpleasantly chewy or tough.

The easiest way to peel a tomato is to



Core and score. Cut out the stem and then cut a shallow "X" in the bottom of each tomato.



A dip in boiling water loosens the skin. When you see the skin begin to curl, remove the tomatoes.



Chill first, then peel. After cooling the tomatoes in ice water, the skin will peel off easily with a knife or your fingers. Once peeled, they're ready to be seeded, sliced, or diced.

quickly blanch it so that the flesh softens just enough to allow the skin to slip off. The technique is simple, but it requires a little planning on the part of the cook.

First, set a pot of water on the stove to boil. The pot should be large enough to hold two or three tomatoes at a time. Fill a bowl with ice water and set it aside.

For each tomato, cut out the stem end, removing all traces of core and hard skin, and then score a shallow "X" on the bottom (see top photo).

When the water is boiling, immerse two or three tomatoes. Watch them carefully, and as soon as you see the skin start to curl away from the top or bottom (which can happen after as little as 5 seconds or as long as 30 seconds, depending on the ripeness), lift the tomato from the water with tongs or a slotted spoon (see middle photo) and plunge it into the ice water. When the tomato is cool, remove it from the water and, with a knife or your fingers, peel off the skin (see photo below). Drain or blot the tomato dry.

To remove the seeds, which can be hard and bitter, cut the tomato in half crosswise. Hold the half upside down and squeeze gently to force out the seeds. You can also scoop out the seeds with your finger or the tip of a small spoon. Now your tomato is skinless and seedless and ready to be sliced, diced, chopped, or puréed, as you like.

—Kaysey McLoughlin, private chef and caterer, Pulaski, Tennessee

Duxelles

Duxelles, a component of classic French cuisine, is a coarse paste made from mushrooms and onions sautéed in butter. The mixture is simply seasoned with salt and pepper, and sometimes with fresh herbs or a splash of soy sauce, white wine, Madeira, or lemon juice.

The flavors and textures of the ingredients in duxelles are well blended, so the mixture seems like a single ingredient and is added to recipes as such. Duxelles (pronounced duke-SEHL) can be used as a stuffing for small birds, can fill mushroom caps or ravioli, and can be rolled up in paupiettes of fish, meat, or poultry. It can also be used to flavor butters, soufflé bases, soups, and sauces.

With the growing variety of mushrooms at the market, duxelles can be made with any type of mushroom, cultivated or wild, to suit many uses. A dollop of duxelles made from smoky porcini mushrooms goes a long way, while common white mushrooms produce a more

mild-mannered mash. Although fresh mushrooms are the traditional ingredient, reconstituted dried wild mushrooms can be used as well, though their flavor will be very strong. A good approach might be to use mostly common white mushrooms with a small portion of dried wild mushrooms for extra flavor.

For basic duxelles, finely chop $\frac{1}{2}$ pound fresh mushrooms and 1 small onion or 1 to 2 shallots. You can chop the mushrooms in a food processor, but be very cautious and use the pulse button so that you don't turn the mushrooms into a wet purée. It's important for the chopped texture to be uniform so that the mushroom pieces cook at the same rate and the final duxelles is fairly smooth. If I'm making a large batch, I like to use the processor for a coarse chop and then finish the task with a chef's knife.

In a frying pan, sauté the onion or shallot in 1 to 2 tablespoons butter until soft but not brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the chopped mushrooms, salt and pepper to taste, 2 teaspoons chopped

fresh parsley, and a pinch of chopped fresh thyme or tarragon, if you like. Cook the mixture over medium-high heat until the mushrooms give off a lot of liquid and then that liquid evaporates completely, 5 to 10 minutes. The mushrooms should be thoroughly cooked and the duxelles should look like a coarse purée. Let the mixture cool slightly and taste it for seasoning. This will make about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups.

If you're using some dried mushrooms, rinse them first, and then soak them in very hot water until tender, about 20 minutes. Lift the mushrooms out of the soaking liquid and rinse them well. (If you like, strain the liquid through a double thickness of cheesecloth or a coffee filter and reserve it to flavor other recipes.) Pat the mushrooms dry and continue as for fresh mushrooms.

Duxelles freezes well, for up to a couple of months if well wrapped in a good freezer, so you can keep a supply on hand.

—Val Cipollone, cookbook editor,
London, England ♦

"NAME YOUR GAME"



EXOTIC MEATS: Bison, Wild Boar, Alligator, Hare, Venison, Elk, Antelope, Wild Turkey, Quail, Goose, Pheasant, Emu, Frog Legs, Turtle, and much more.

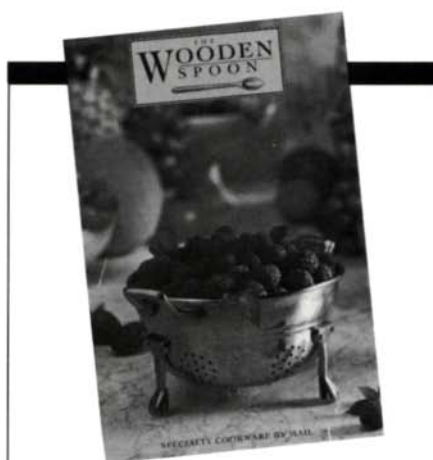
Quail Eggs, Prawns Pates, Mousses, Fresh Foie Gras. Also Spices & Kitchen Accessories

Krups • Kitchen Aid • J.A. Henckels.

1-800-237-7423



International HomeCooking
854 Tiffany Blvd.
Rocky Mount, N.C. 27804
\$2.00 Catalog rebate certificate
MC/Visa



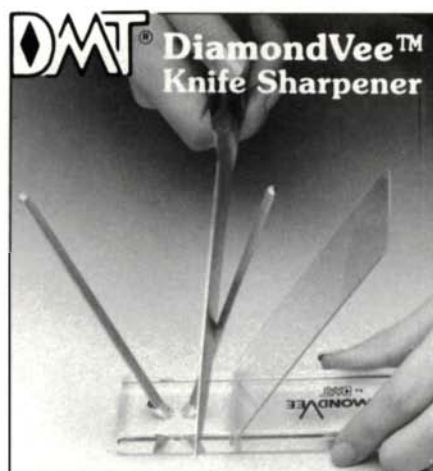
this indispensable catalog offers hundreds of hard-to-find cooking tools, cutlery, bakeware, cookware and gourmet ingredients. You'll find kitchen accessories from the world's best manufacturers as well as many items hand crafted exclusively for us. And everything we sell is backed by our 100% guarantee.

Phone or write today for a complimentary copy.

1-800-431-2207



P.O. Box 931, Dept. R4935, Clinton, CT 06413



DiamondVee™ takes the guess work out of choosing the correct angle for sharpening. Two 4" diamond coated rods are mounted at the correct angle so that any cook can give their knife an optimum edge.

Fast • Accurate • Easy

\$31.75 Suggested retail

At Fine Department and Speciality Stores

AMERICA'S FINEST KNIFE AND TOOL SHARPENERS

DMT™ DIAMOND MACHINING TECHNOLOGY, INC.

Dept. FC94, 85 Hayes Memorial Dr.
Marlborough, MA 01752 USA

1-800-666-4DMT FAX (508)485-3924

Chinese Cookbooks

For a long time, Chinese cooking eluded my culinary expertise. I rusted my way through three or four perfectly good woks and amassed a small truckload of "Wok Cooking for Idiots" manuals before a friend recommended Irene Kuo's *The Key to Chinese Cooking* (KNOPF, 1977. \$35, HARDCOVER; 532 PP. ISBN 0-394-49638-8).

The cover of Irene Kuo's *The Key to Chinese Cooking* is a solid red color. The title is written in large, white, serif font. Above the title, the author's name 'Irene Kuo' is in a smaller, green, serif font. Below the title, there is a small, square, gold-colored emblem. At the bottom, there is a quote from James A. Beard in white text.

"I had never found what I considered to be a really great working book on Chinese food and cooking until I read *The Key to Chinese Cooking* by Irene Kuo... the most literate, clear and comprehensive of all the Chinese cookbooks on the market today... a friendly and instructive book that practically takes you by the hand and leads you step by step..."
—James A. Beard

Kuo's wonderful book begins with a 100-page discussion of Chinese ingredients and utensils, and illustrated sections on basic chopping and slicing techniques. She divides the actual cooking procedures into four main categories (cooking in liquid, in oil, and with wet or dry heat); each category presents master recipes with variations for each specific procedure. Granted, this may be confusing later when you can't find a recipe under "Meat" because it's under "Cooking in Oil," but once you get used to her organization, you can just use the index. For example, "Cooking in Liquid" begins with basic recipes for stock and continues with white-cut cooking (a special simmering method for poultry and

meat), red cooking (stewing), and finally to *lu*, a master sauce for simmering eggs, meat, and fish. These discussions and instructions provide the basic procedures for the preparation of any particular recipe or type of food, as well as a foundation on which to practice adventurous improvisation.

Kuo's emphasis on technique doesn't mean that she skimps on the recipes. Everything is here, from Egg Drop Soup to Peking Duck. The recipes are embedded either in anecdotes about the dish or in descriptions of the final result, which work better than pictures to evoke the total experience of the finished product. The ingredient lists and instructions are subtly grouped by preparatory steps, keeping the novice from feeling overwhelmed, while allowing the more experienced cook to calculate the cooking commitment (and its results) at a glance.

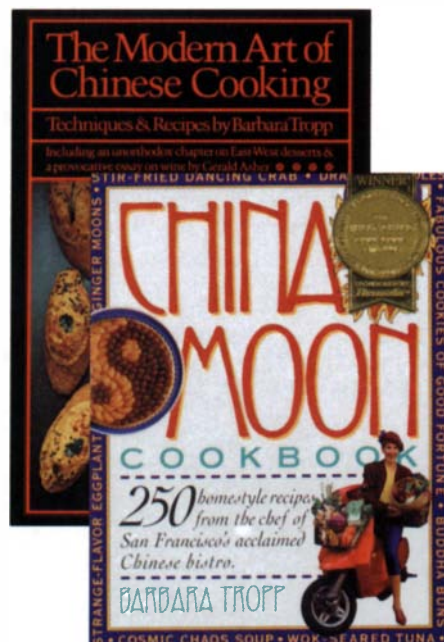
Finally, Kuo's instructions function both pragmatically and aesthetically. For Lamb & Scallions, "shower in the scallions; stir rapidly in tossing motions.... Then quickly splash in the seasoning sauce and stir vigorously in sweeping and flipping motions." For Spicy Pork with Peanuts, "stir briskly in turning and tossing motions... then skid and roll the pieces in the spicy oil." These descriptions—shower, stir, toss, splash, sweep, flip, skid, and roll—illustrate precise cooking techniques, highlighting the sensual possibilities of the cooking process.

I love this book and have cooked with it for many years. It has seen me through from novice to expert status, and its only infelicity is the extremely occasional call for "catsup." I just substitute tomato paste and forget about it.

Despite my loyalty to Kuo, I also recommend the two following books, especially if you find that you have a feeling for Chinese cookery as well as its philosophical underpinnings: Barbara Tropp's *The Modern Art of Chinese Cooking* (WILLIAM MORROW, 1982. \$30, HARDCOVER; 544 PP. ISBN 0-688-00566-7), and especially her more recent *China Moon Cookbook* [WORKMAN PUBLISHING, 1992. \$14.95, SOFTCOVER (HARDCOVER AVAILABLE); 518 PP. ISBN 0-89480-754-4 (HARDCOVER, 1-56305-315-2)].

The Modern Art is also an excellent beginner's book. Tropp's goal is to "cre-

ate Chinese cooks," and to this end she begins with a discussion of the Chinese philosophies of yin and yang and their application in the kitchen. She then proceeds to discuss in depth the various cooking techniques (but without recipes). Additionally, she insists on natural, fresh ingredients and will brook no unhealthful shortcuts (forget catsup!). Finally, she includes instructions for "rescuing" rusted woks, and only slightly compulsively spends twenty pages anatomizing the proportions of Chinese cleavers, as well as discussing their various types, uses, storage, and maintenance. As in Kuo's book, the almost 100 pages of preparatory discussion are



illustrated by drawings, and Tropp includes various appendices and some supplementary articles, as well as a thorough, illustrated discussion of noodle-making, which Kuo's book does not.

On the plus side, the dishes are more idiosyncratic than Kuo's. For example, Anise-Spiced Soybeans and Smooth & Spicy Tofu Spread are both welcome additions to the traditional fare. On the negative side, Tropp's presentation of recipes is not methodical. She uses *lu* in a recipe but doesn't explain what it is or how it's made. Later, you find this information in another recipe, but only by accident. Similarly, while she gives exhaustive instructions about choosing, cleaning, and defatting a duck, these in-

structions are included only in one of the later duck recipes.

On the other hand, the ingredient lists and recipe instructions are lucid and methodical, and Tropp's passion and enthusiasm permeate every word. (Keep an eye out for the anecdote about Kuo.) However, her real tour de force is *The China Moon Cookbook*, and if you have celestial ambitions, this is the vehicle to get you there. *China Moon's* 250 recipes begin with the "China Moon Pantry," recipes for basic ingredients like Roasted Szechwan Pepper Salt and Serrano-Lemongrass Vinegar. In Tropp's view, every flavor can be augmented, echoed, harmonized, counterpointed; every spice can be fresher, every oil can be more complex—Five Spice Flavor Oil calls for "shockingly pungent dried red chili flakes." Every taste must be "three-tiered" at the very least, and even chicken stock can be "doubled" by making stock with stock instead of water. ("Making stocks in a restaurant kitchen," Tropp assures us, "is a near-religious experience.")

Tropp's approach to cooking is either exhilarating or exhausting, and if for you it's the latter, she grudgingly presents substitutions. *China Moon* is another anecdotal, personality-driven book, with intriguing and informative sidebars, "not authentically Chinese [but] nevertheless in a very traditional mode," such as the one for Chinese "crackerjacks."

Don't let the book's casual appearance fool you. This is a serious book with enough new combinations, as well as takes on more traditional recipes (three versions of Hot & Sour Soup!) to keep the most adventurous cooks happy for a long time.

Each of these books covers the range of Chinese regional cooking, but one narrowly focused book worth considering is *Florence Lin's Complete Book of Chinese Noodles, Dumplings and Breads*, by Florence Lin. [WILLIAM MORROW/QUILL, 1986. \$12, SOFTCOVER; 345 PP. ISBN 0-688-12845-9 (HARD- COVER: \$19.95; 400 PP. ISBN 0-688-03796-8)].

In this narrative-style book, Lin be-

gins with a brief history of grain production and use (she points out that millet, not rice, was the first Chinese staple). Her recipes are organized by dough type—wheat, rice, and beans—with a section on sauces and relishes. For wheat dough, she offers a master recipe with variations that pretty much covers every kind of noodle or dumpling wrapper, and she also includes separate recipes and



drawings for hand cutting, pasta machine, and food processor techniques.

Additionally, Lin's lovely book presents recipes for hot stir-fried dishes, cold salads, meat and vegetable fillings for fried and steamed dumplings, soups (she begins with a basic broth and increases the complexity), and dipping sauces. Her ingredient lists are logical and her instructions are lucid. The brand-name substitutions she includes for people too busy to make noodles by hand should preclude any excuses for not trying at least some of the recipes.

Finally, more advanced cooks might want to consider the series of books published by the Wei-Chuan Cultural Educational Foundation. From what I gather,

these books are distributed by a cooking school in Taiwan, but are generally available in the United States. (If your local bookstore doesn't stock them, ask to have them ordered.) Aimed primarily at Chinese home cooks, these books might even serve as primers for Chinese restaurateurs. It's difficult to tell because most of the writing is in Chinese. The ingredients and instructions, however, are in English. The two books I've seen are *Chinese Cuisine Szechwan Style* and *Chinese Dim Sum* (CHIN PUBLISHING, 1990-93. \$19.95, SOFTCOVER, BUT WITH STIFF, STURDY PLASTIC COVERS; APPROXIMATELY 100 PP. ISBN 0-941676-31-5 AND 0-941676-24-2, RESPECTIVELY).

Both are full-color glossy affairs, with lots of instructive photographs numbered to a specific group of ingredients or instructions. The instructions themselves are methodically laid out, although be warned that no preparatory discussion or glossaries are included. These extremely authentic books do include recipes like Sea Cucumber with Brown Sauce, and the recipe for Hot & Sour Soup calls for both dried cuttlefish and the duck's blood American

cooks generally forego (but without which, most Chinese cooks agree, the soup just can't be made). In a more familiar vein, reliable recipes for dishes like Lemon Chicken, Kun-Pao Shrimp, and Catfish with Garlic Sauce predominate. The *Dim Sum* book is less exotic ingredient-wise, but its sheer artistry fascinates nonetheless. The dumplings and other small dishes are exquisitely presented. Experienced dough manipulators might want to try Four Colored Steamed Dumplings (open dumplings with different stuffings in four individual compartments). Lotus Pastries turn out (or at least they should) as flaky, six-pointed stars with a delicate rainbow of color from center to edge, and Emerald Fish Dumplings sport little pea eyes.

—Lisa Ornest teaches English at Hunter and Baruch Colleges and is a freelance writer in New York City. She has managed to hold on to the same wok for the past five years without letting it rust. ♦

CALENDAR

Sponsoring an event that you want readers to know about? Send an announcement to Calendar, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Be sure to include dates, a complete address, and the phone number to call for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. We go to press three months before the issue date of the magazine and must be notified well in advance. The deadline for entries in the October/November issue is July 1.

ALABAMA

Festival—20th Annual Sorghum Sopping Days, September 17–18, Waldo. Call Wayne Collier at 205/362-6104.

ARIZONA

Classes—Food Fest, August 26–28, Sheraton San Marcos Resort, Chandler. A weekend of cooking classes, seminars, and tastings. Call 602/963-6655.

ARKANSAS

Festival—18th Annual Hope Watermelon Festival, August 18–21, Fair Park, Hope. Call 501/777-3640.

CALIFORNIA

Auction—14th Annual Sonoma County Showcase & Wine Auction, August 4–7, Rohnert Park. For information, call 707/586-3795.

Auction—Fête at the Fed, August 5, Federal Reserve Banking Hall, San Francisco. International wine competition, public awards ceremony, wine tasting, and benefit auction. Call 415/703-2729.

Conference—11th Annual American Cheese Society Conference, August 10–13, Rohnert Park. For information, call 212/727-7939.

Fair—13th Annual San Francisco Fair, September 3–5, Civic Center Plaza, San Francisco. For information, call 415/703-2729.

Festival—10th Annual A La Carte, A La Park, September 3–5, Sharon Meadow, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. For information, call 415/383-9378.

Festival—35th Annual Artichoke Festival, September 17–18, Castroville. Call 408/633-2465.

Showcase—3rd Annual Mendocino Bounty, August 21, Fetzner Food & Wine Center, Hopland. Sampling of food and wine from more than 60 county producers. Call Anne Brandt at 707/462-4716.

Workshop—8th Annual American Harvest Workshop, September 10–14, Cakebread Cellars, Rutherford. Educational seminars and dinners. For information, call Karen Cakebread at 707/963-5221.

COLORADO

Classes—Cooking School of the Rockies, Boulder. August 4–5: Chef Robert Reynolds leads two evening courses: A Tuscan Summer Evening; American & French Farm Cheeses. Call 303/494-7988.

CONNECTICUT

Festival—A Taste of History from Mystic Seaport, August 4–7, Mystic. Demonstrations of 19th century cooking in a Victorian home, a ship's galley, and a wayside tavern. Call 203/572-5315.

Classes—The Silo Cooking School, New Milford. September 9–10: Chef Jacques Pepin is back for two Master Classes. For information, call 203/355-0300.

GEORGIA

Classes—Sainte Claire Services, Dunwoody. Small group cooking classes in Atlanta area with emphasis on technique, taste, and nutrition. For information, call 404/394-1248.

HAWAII

Festival—3rd Annual A Taste of Lahaina, September 16–18, Lahaina Center, Maui. Call 808/667-9175.

ILLINOIS

Food Show—6th Annual Best of the Midwest Market at Ravinia, September 4, Ravinia Festival Grounds, Highland Park. Food and beverages from 12 Midwestern states. Call 708/433-8800.

INDIANA

Festival—48th Annual Persimmon Festival, September 17–24, Mitchell. Call 800/580-1985.

KENTUCKY

Festival—25th Annual Marion County Ham Days, September 24–25, Lebanon. For information, call 502/692-2661.

LOUISIANA

Classes—Culinary Arts Institute of Louisiana, Baton Rouge. August & September: Weekends of Fun and Learning; Cajun/Creole, Italian, International, French, Pastries & Desserts, Sauces. For information, call 800/927-0839.

MAINE

Festival—47th Annual Maine Lobster Festival, August 4–7, Harbor Park, Rockland. For information, call 207/596-0376.

MARYLAND

Classes—Baltimore International Culinary College, Baltimore. August through September, weekly hands-on courses. Call 410/752-1446.

Fair—47th National Hard Crab Derby, September 2–4, Crisfield. For information, call 800/782-3913.

MICHIGAN

Festival—Midsummer Herb Festival, August 13–14, Sunshine Farm & Garden, Commerce Twp. How to use culinary herbs. For information, call 810/685-2204.

Fair—10th Annual Herb Fair in the Country, September 17–18, Sunshine Farm & Garden, Commerce Twp. Herbal arts and crafts. For information, call 810/685-2204.

NEBRASKA

Festival—26th Annual Applejack Celebration, September 17–18, Nebraska City. For information, call 800/514-9113.

NEW MEXICO

Festival—4th Annual Santa Fe Wine & Chile Fiesta, September 22–25, Santa Fe. Call 505/982-8686.

NEW YORK

Cake Decorating Contest—The Chocolate Gallery School of Confectionery Arts, New York City. September 25. For information, call 212/675-CAKE.

Contest—State of Dessert Recipe Contest deadline for entries: August 31. Cooks compete using official food of their state in an original dessert recipe. For information, call 800/972-2784.

Symposium—Chinese Cuisine and the American Palate, September 22–24, Queens College, Flushing. For information, call 718/997-4153.

Tasting—9th Annual AIWF Marketplace Tasting, September 24, World Trade Center Mezzanine, New York City. For information, call 212/447-0456.

PENNSYLVANIA

Festival—103rd Annual McClure Bean Soup Celebration, September 13–17, McClure. For information, call 800/338-7389.

Festival—National Mushroom Festival, September 13–24, Kennett Square. Call 800/932-6369.

WASHINGTON

Festival—Indian-Style Salmon Bake, August 14, Sequim. Call Dan Edwards at 206/683-9624.




ATTENTION

Readers of *The Wine Advocate*,
The Wine Spectator, *Bon Appetit*,
Food and Wine, or *Wine and Spirits*:

If you read any of these magazines, then
you need a **FREE** subscription to the

IWA Gift Catalog

Your ultimate source for glassware, decanters,
corkscrews, wine racks, refrigerated wine storage
units, and other exciting wine accouterments!

**CALL TODAY FOR YOUR
FREE SUBSCRIPTION**

1-800-527-4072

The Antique Mall And Crown Restaurant



Smoked Catfish Pate' The Perfect Gourmet Gift! It's Uniquely Mississippi! *Classic Catfish*

A NEW cookbook of exciting and
unusual catfish recipes from this
gourmet restaurant in the
Mississippi Delta—
Hard cover that opens flat \$14.95
*Our Gourmet Pie Mixes are
Fabulous!*

Call to order or receive our brochure

1-800-833-7731

P.O. Box 540, Indianola, MS 38751

FAX: 601-887-5547

Professional CHEF

Training

- Accelerated A.O.S. Degree
- Small Classes
- Continuing Education



Scottsdale
Culinary
Institute

CALL
(602) 990-3773
(800) 848-2433
Scottsdale, Arizona

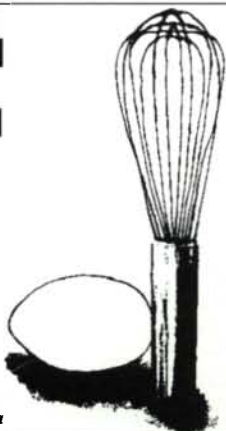


TABLE TOP TEMPERER

Electronic Digital Temperature Readout

for melting and tempering chocolate
and compound coatings



**American Chocolate
Mould Co.**

3194 Lawson Blvd.
Oceanside, NY 11572
516-766-1414
FAX 516-766-1485



NEW!

\$695.00 Shipped UPS • Extra Bowls - \$29.50 • Extra Scrapers - \$17.50

Mangia

Cooking Software that Makes Sense!

Let your Macintosh™ power through the "book work" of cooking. Zero in on recipes by ingredient and many other ways, plan meals, scale recipes and create shopping lists at the speed of thought.

Acclaimed by **Cookbook Review** as "great culinary software!," **Mangia!** is **unconditionally guaranteed** to delight you.

Mangia! runs on any modern Macintosh (without HyperCard™) and comes with over 300 recipes for well under \$50.



UPSTILL
SOFTWARE

1442A Walnut • Berkeley, CA • 94709

Call 1-800-JOT-DOWN to order or learn more.

gourmet cutlery

Chicago Cutlery

Your Choice

OPEN STOCK CUTLERY

The Walnut Tradition by Chicago Cutlery
Customize your knife collection with quality and
classic styling at our everyday low price -

Save 25% off list

	List	Our Price
A. Sharpening Steel	26.00	19.50
B. 8" Slicer	36.00	27.00
C. 8" Chef's Knife	43.00	32.25
D. 7" Bread Knife	34.00	25.50
E. Mini Cleaver	28.00	21.00
F. 3" Paring Knife	15.00	11.25
G. 5" Utility Knife	23.00	17.25
H. Kitchen Shears	30.00	22.50

Call us **Toll free**
800 829 6090

WHOLE EARTH

A C C E S S

AMERICAN SPOON®



NATIVE HICKORY AND BUTTERNUTS
WILD CHOKECHERRY PRESERVES
SEEDLESS BLACK RASPBERRY BUTTER
MICHIGAN MORELS
MICHIGAN MAPLE CREAM
GREAT LAKES SEAFOOD SAUCE

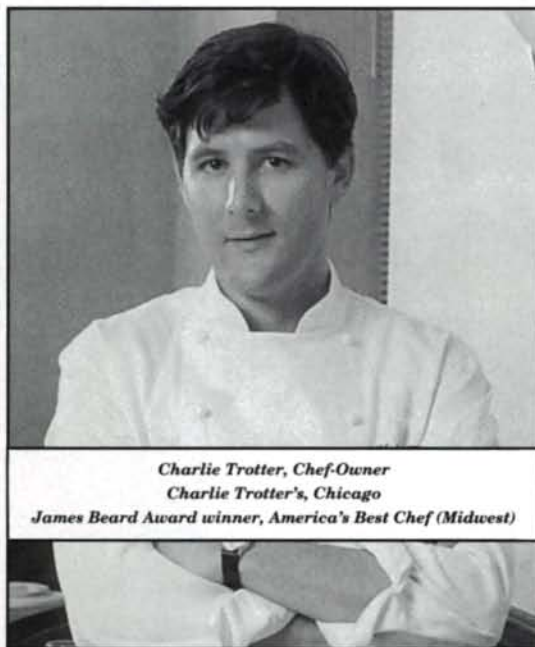
*"We capture and preserve
what nature makes perfect"*

To receive our free catalogue
of hard to find foods:

800-222-5886

P.O. Box 566, Petoskey, MI 49770

"'Highest caliber' describes the graduates of Peter Kump's we've had at the restaurant."



Charlie Trotter, Chef-Owner
Charlie Trotter's, Chicago
James Beard Award winner, America's Best Chef (Midwest)

**PETER KUMP'S
SCHOOL OF
CULINARY
ARTS** For the information about our career and
"home cooking" courses, or to arrange for a visit, call
800-522-4610. Other locations in Washington D.C.,
New Jersey, Westchester and Long Island, N.Y.

"...Their knowledge of food and food chemistry is first rate and their technical skills are superior. The school solidly prepares a young cook for the exacting discipline of being a chef."

We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

At Peter Kump's New York Cooking School we're getting people ready for top level careers--and because we require two years of college for admission, we can do it in only 20 weeks.

Our apprenticeship program boasts placement in the most prestigious establishments here and abroad. Our graduates take their pick of the thousands of new food industry jobs available each year and work in the most exclusive restaurants in the country. Or run their own rewarding businesses. In as little as 20 weeks.

**PETER KUMP'S
NEW YORK
COOKING
SCHOOL**

307 EAST 92 ST. NEW YORK, N.Y. 10128

Lessons In Creative Cuisine

**"Cooking with Class"
Announces New
Class Schedule**

Heart of Pa. Mountains, 1½
hrs. from Manhattan, minutes
to Victorian Village of Milford,
Pa. Commercial Kitchen Studio,
1000 Cookbook Research
Library

**GUEST CHEF SERIES,
DAY CLASSES,
WEEK-LONG
DESSERT FRENZY,
THE BASICS**

Call/Write for Brochure

**Cooking w/Class
2221 Twin Lakes Rd.
Shohola, Pa. 18458
717-296-6066
or
800-226-6540**

There is nothing hotter than...

"SCORNE WOMAN" Hot Sauce



Scorned Woman is
made from a secret
combination of
four peppers
and spices creating a
sensational taste.

FANTASTIC
EXPLODING FLAVOR
for Buffalo Wings,
Blackened Fish
or the best of the best
Bloody Mary.

Packaged in a
black felt bag \$6.99
or plain \$5.99
including shipping.

Taste for Gourmet Gallery

6289 W. Sample Rd.,
Coral Springs, FL 33067
call (800)-TASTEY1
827-8391

VISA, MC, & DISCOVER

Protect Your Issues of Fine Cooking



SLIPCASES FOR YOUR BACK ISSUES.

Bound in red leatherette and embossed in gold, each case holds up to ten issues of *Fine Cooking*, and costs \$7.95 (save: buy 3 for \$21.95, 6 for \$39.95). Add \$1.00/case for p&h. Outside the U.S., add \$2.50 each (U.S. funds only). PA residents add 7% sales tax. Send your order and payment to the address below, or call toll free, 1-800-825-6690, and use your credit card (minimum \$15).

Jesse Jones Ind., Dept. FC, 499 E. Erie Ave.,
Philadelphia, PA 19134. (No P.O. boxes, please)

Basil

I never thought of basil as romantic until an Italian friend told me how young men in his village would wear a sprig of it tucked behind one ear when they went courting. Or, as a symbol of fidelity, a couple might exchange pieces of the fragrant herb. Boccaccio, the 14th-century Italian author, wrote a tragic love story wherein Lisabetta's daily tears watered the pot of basil in which she had buried her lover's head. The English poet John Keats then recycled this fable as *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*.

The many kinds of basil are all tropical, originally from India and Africa. In India it was venerated, sacred to the gods Vishnu and Krishna. Upon its introduction to Europe in the 16th century, the herb was at first used for its sweet scent in nosegays, sweet waters, and scent bags, not for culinary purposes. Other uses, more fantastical, involved its reputed pain-killing properties. Eating basil would supposedly protect one from the pain of a scorpion's sting. Or, if a woman in labor held a root of basil and the feather of a swallow in her hand, she would be delivered without pain. Charles Estienne in his *La Maison Rustique*, published in 1600, reported that basil grew best if it were sown with curses, and if the plants were struck, they would grow taller and better.

Today this simple herb, a member of the mint family, is readily available in the produce section of supermarkets, as fresh leaves ready for use, and sometimes even as a potted plant to stand on a sunny kitchen windowsill. An easily grown tender annual, basil needs full sun and moist but well-drained soil for good growth. This is one of the first herbs a novice gardener might choose to cultivate.

Basils are intolerant of cold and die with the first frost, as might be expected of plants from mild climates. Basil seeds will not germinate if the soil is cold. Either start the seeds indoors several weeks before the weather is mild and settled or (where the growing season is long enough) sow them directly outdoors when the ground is warm.

There are many varieties of basil: Lettuce Leaf has a large, three-inch-long, fresh green leaf on plants eighteen inches tall; Sweet Italian Large Leaf and Sweet

Genovese are very similar. Dwarf basils such as Spicy Globe grow a diminutive six to eight inches tall and have proportionately small leaves. Not all basils are green: Purple Ruffles has a curly, fringed, deep purple leaf and grows eighteen inches tall; Dark Opal has a similar deep purple leaf, but the leaves are smooth-edged like those of Lettuce Leaf basil.

Everyone is familiar with basil's warm, fragrant, not-quite-licorice flavor. Some varieties have subtle other flavors. Anise basil has dark green leaves and a licorice scent and taste that are reminiscent of fennel. Cinnamon basil has a spicy flavor; Lemon basil, originally from Thailand, has a clean citrus fragrance, and light green, narrow leaves. Holy basil is an Indian variety with a long-lasting, pungent fragrance. For culinary uses, one of the most popular varieties is Fino Verde, with small, one-inch-long, dark green leaves and exceptional flavor.

Basil is an herb of many uses. It can be simple—snipped over sliced tomatoes fresh from the garden, or stirred into scrambled eggs or an omelet. Basil is an important flavoring for minestrone. Pasta can be simply dressed with pesto, a purée of basil and olive oil, smoothed with the addition of pine nuts, flavored with garlic, and enriched with some Parmesan cheese (Good proportions are three cups basil, leaves only, ½ cup extra-virgin cold-pressed olive oil, two cloves garlic, ¼ cup each pine nuts and cheese, and a pinch of salt. Blend in a food processor until smooth.) I like to use pesto as a dressing for a white bean salad served at room temperature. Last February in Cancun, I had pesto with some additional olive oil drizzled over a flour tortilla that had first been scored with a pizza cutter into eight segments and then lightly toasted. Delicious!

The flavor of fresh basil is so much better and more definitive than the dried fragments of uncertain age from the spice shelf that I cannot imagine being without it. When plants are in their most vigorous summer growth, leaves may be processed into pesto and stored in the refrigerator in a sealed glass jar, the surface filmed with olive oil. A clean jar stuffed full of washed and dried basil and filled with vinegar re-

OCIMUM BASILICUM



sults in a savory seasoned vinegar after standing in the sun for a week, shaken daily. Strain into a clean jar and seal. Wrap individual portions of basil leaves in plastic film, staple the packets to a piece of cardboard to keep them together, and freeze them. The leaves will turn black when they're thawed, but they're fine for use in soups and other cooked dishes where appearance isn't important.

Basil is an indispensable ingredient in summer salads, pasta dishes, and winter's warming soups. Welcome it into your garden and enjoy its versatility in your kitchen.

Judy Glattstein, a landscape consultant in Wilton, Connecticut, teaches classes on herbs as complementary components for both garden and kitchen use. Like most gardeners, she likes to cook, and like most cooks, she prefers to use garden-fresh ingredients whenever possible. ♦



The Original and Authentic Japanese Teriyaki Marinade & Sauce

Over 100 years ago this recipe was discovered and handed down from generation to generation. Now, brought to us by Miko's great granddaughter this amazing marinade will transform your meals into tantalizing delights.

No MSG 24oz.

Send \$19.95 plus \$6.00 S&H to: Miko/Carter Inc.
20423 State Road 7, Suite 6104, Boca Raton FL 33498.
Phone 1.800.484.9000 ext. Miko (6456)
for orders and great recipes. (FL res. add 6% sales tax)

Wüsthof-Trident
6" Cook's Knife \$65 \$39.95

Classic, White Classic or Grand Prix
SAH \$4.75
CT Res. \$2.68 Sales Tax



Professional Cutlery Direct
(800) 859-6994

Free catalogue of great savings on fine European cutlery
Dept. FCI48, 170 Boston Post Rd., Ste. 135, Madison, CT 06443

Classic Spicy Rotisserie Blend

We have taken our unique, aromatic combinations of herbs & savory spices and blended them together to satisfy even the most discriminating palate. Excellent for baking or grilling chicken, turkey, kabobs & roasts. Definitely a culinary treat! 4 oz. - \$5.99 incl. S/H. Send check or money order to:

The Spice Rack
11110 Elmfield Drive, Tampa, FL 33625
800-699-1399



China Replacements

• BUY • SELL • LOCATE

2263 WILLIAMS CREEK RD.
HIGH RIDGE, MO 63049
1-(800) 562-2655 Fax (314) 376-6319

FREE COOKBOOK CATALOG
American Regional Cuisine.

Hundreds of community, Jr. League & regional cookbooks, many hard to find. Everything from down-home to gourmet, for novice & seasoned cooks alike! Write:

Lion House • Box 91283-Dept. KD • Pittsburgh, PA 15221

Magnolia

A Catalog of Delights from the Sunny South

...Original sauces, marinades, specialty food items and decorative home accessories.
Featuring unique North Carolina products.

Call or Write for Free Catalog

Magnolia Products
P.O. Box 1497, Davidson, North Carolina 28036
1-800-259-1158



Arden's Gardens

- Gourmet Vinegars - 13 varieties
- Gourmet Mustards - 7 varieties
- Salsas - Herb Blends - Tart Cherry Rice Pilaf

Our own recipes, made with herbs we grow!
Perfect for low-cal or low-fat diets.
Call or write for **FREE CATALOG**
4603 Berkshire • Detroit, MI 48224
(313) 882-2222 • MC/VISA/DISC

Specialty Honey's



Direct from Provence, France
You've never tasted honeys like these!

Varieties include Lavender, Rosemary, Provence Wild Flower and other regional favorites. 100% Grade A - sold in only the finest gourmet shops of France.

Call, Write or Fax:
Trillium International
310 Willow Lane - Dept. 2F
New Holland, PA 17557
(717) 354-4503 Fax: (717) 355-9330
UPS Daily Wholesale Welcome



ARMENO COFFEE ROASTERS LTD

Discover small-batch roasted quality. We use only the finest beans from around the world, and roast and ship daily.

Call today for your **FREE** catalog.

1-800-ARMENO-1
(1-800-276-3661)

1-800-ARMENO-1

Melissa's by Mail
GOURMET PRODUCE



If you love good food, but have limited time to search for special ingredients, *Melissa's by Mail* can help. Our **FREE Catalog** features herbs, spices and exotic produce from around the world. If real Honeycomb, Dried Cranberries, Sweet Dumpling Squash, Tabouleh, Fresh Chiles, and Macadamia Nuts sound good to you, **CALL US!** We're your one-stop source for over 500 items! Ask for the Mail Order Dept.

melissa's **1-800-588-0151**

World Variety Produce, Inc., P.O. Box 21127, L.A., CA 90021



Stuffed Olives

Jalapeno, Garlic, Anchovy, Almond, Onion or Mushroom

3-5oz. Jar Sampler Pack \$11.00 S&H prepaid

VISA / MC **1-800-327-2572**
El Rancho 3322 Fowler St. Los Angeles CA 90063

THE ORIGINAL
Eastern Shore Crabcakes

An elegant & easy dining solution. Our crabcakes started it all. Made by hand using the finest Chesapeake Bay Crabmeat. All you do is heat & serve. Enjoy an Eastern Shore Tradition!

- Fresh, shucked Oysters
- Soft-shell Crabs • Shad & Shad Roe
- Gift Packages & Certificates
- Cookbooks • Aged Virginia Hams

Please send me your free brochure

Chesapeake Express Ltd.
Route 1, Box 38 • Centreville, MD • 21617
800-282-CRAB

This Fall Season is the perfect time to try "The Best Lamb in America"! Featured in the nation's finest restaurants, our natural young lamb is shipped directly from our farm to you, with our own recipe booklet.

Taste the difference!

1 leg of lamb (approx. 3 1/2 - 4 lbs.)
6 lamb chops (rib and loin)
\$65.00 + \$6.00 s&h
western USA add \$8.00 per box

Serving the country's Best Chefs



Jamison Farm •
1-800-237-5262
Major Cards Accepted

Sukey and John Jamison
Jamison Farm
171 Jamison Lane
Latrobe, PA
15650-9400

LOOKING FOR A COOKING SCHOOL?

• NEW SIXTH EDITION •

1994

THE GUIDE TO COOKING SCHOOLS

Cooking Schools, Courses, Vacations, Apprenticeships and Wine Instruction Throughout the World

SHAWGUIDES

• 326 PAGES •

You'll find it in this comprehensive resource to over 700 career and vacation programs worldwide.

Recommended by *Bon Appétit*, *Gourmet*, *The New York Times*

Just \$22.95 ppd.
ShawGuides, Box 1295
NY, NY 10023
Credit cards call:
(800) 247-6553 or
Fax (419) 281-6883

Did your fork run away with a spoon?™

We match
STERLING SILVER SILVERPLATE STAINLESS



call or write for a **FREE** price list of your pattern

WILMA SAXTON, INC. ©1988
37 Clementon Rd., Box 395
Berlin, NJ 08009

609-767-8640 FAX 609-768-7795
Mon. - Fri. 10AM - 6PM E.S.T.

MAIL & PHONE ORDERS WELCOME
Hagerty Silver Products

BUY N.J. RESIDENTS ADD 6% SALES TAX. **SELL**

Belleweather Chocolate **Chocolate Lovers!**



A Belleweather Specialty
Chocolate Scone Mix.
Quick, easy,
delicious treat.

Sampler: 3 boxes \$15.00
(incl. shipping)

Rt. 1 Box 1207,
Hallowell, ME
1-800-610-5544

The **CMC** Company

CHILES CHILES CHILES

EVERYTHING MEXICAN
Chiles, Salsas, Moles, Specialties, Cookbooks

THAI—INDONESIAN INGREDIENTS
Lemon Grass Pwdr, Curry Pastes, Sambals

SZECHWAN CHINESE NECESSITIES
Hot Bean Paste, Sweet Bean Paste, Szech. Pepper

EVERY CONCEIVABLE HERB & SPICE
FOR INDIAN CURRIES & SPECIALTIES

PO Box 322
Avaion, NJ 08202 1-800-CMC-2780

The Unique **BRISKER**
ELECTRIC
Keeps Dry Food Crisper!



Whether it's
HOT & HUMID or
COOL & DAMP,
crackers, cereal, chips
and snacks stay fresh,
crisp and tasty almost
indefinitely in the
electric BRISKER.

Made in the USA since 1971, the UL listed BRISKER is an imaginative
yet practical gift for friends, family and, of course, yourself!
Call us for the name of your nearest dealer.

1-800-356-9080



CANADIAN LAKE WILD RICE
A delicious and nutritious year-round
treat. Assorted packaging. Gift Boxes.
Brochure. M/C and VISA accepted.
Call 1-800-MJ GIFTS (654-4387)

M.J. GOURMET GIFTS
P.O. Box 206, Dept. FC, Menasha, WI 54902-0206

FLAVOR YOUR FOODS
LIKE A PROFESSIONAL



Create stocks for soups, sauces, casseroles,
dips, dressings, etc. Redi-Base available
in Chicken, Beef, Vegetable, Seafood,
Turkey, & Ham. Easy to use. Free "Idea
Book" including hundreds of recipes.
Choose four 8 oz. containers for \$29.95.
Less than 3 cents per prepared ounce.
To order by credit card or for more information:
1-800-820-5121

Atiu Coffee

The rare and exotic gourmet
sensation from the South Pacific.
17.6 oz. bag \$12.95 plus S & H: \$3.50 1st
bag, \$1.00 each additional bag. Whole
beans only. Amex accepted.

An exclusive of:

J. Patrick Sales
P.O. Box 43175
Upper Montclair
New Jersey 07043
1-800-792-2262




TOMATO TANGO
A TANGY TOMATO SPREAD
and other
NO-FAT DELIGHTS
from STONEHILL FARM

All Natural
FRUIT
SPREADS
& FRUIT
BUTTERS



FREE CATALOG
1-800-776-7155
MC/VISA
PO Box 158
Schwenksville, PA
19473




WILD RICE
Minnesota No. 1 Long Grain
\$6.00 per lb. 5lb. minimum
UPS prepaid. 25lbs. \$5.50 per
lb. UPS prepaid. Gift packaging
information on request, same
basic prices. Recipes included.
Floura Wild Rice
Box 44T
Blackduck, MN 56630
or call 218-835-6667

Herb 'n' Lore
Healthy eating doesn't have
to be boring!
Use Herb 'n' Lore spice blends
for a gourmet touch.

Culinary Spice Blends & Teas
African, Cajun, Indian, Italian, Mexican, French, Caribbean,
Thai/Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, Southwestern

Herb 'n' Lore
11 Nadine Court
Thousand Oaks, CA. 91320
(805) 499-7505
For FREE catalogs send LSASE

POCKET COOKBOOK STAND



Amazing new cookbook stand holds
large books yet folds to checkbook size
for easy storage in a drawer or cabinet.
Sleek design has rounded edges and is
made of sturdy ABS plastic. For Info
414-427-9343 or send \$9.95 to:
DAYLIGHT ENTERPRISES, INC.
P.O. Box 500, Greendale, WI, 53129

THE KNIFE
YOU'LL REACH FOR



CERAMIC ZIRCONIA BLADE
MAKES CUTTING SILKY SMOOTH

- Diamond-hard white Kyocera blade • Sharper
than any steel edge • Lightweight and perfectly
balanced • Stays razor sharp - never needs
sharpening • One-year factory warranty
- The ideal gift for the serious cook •

5" All-Purpose Slicer \$59.95 + \$5 shp.
Order now from: ShawGuides
Box 1295, New York NY 10023
Credit cards: (800) 247-6553 or Fax (419) 281-6883

Who's shopping the Cook's Market? People who
love cooking and food! They're buying specialty
foods, kitchen tools, table accessories, books and
videos, classes to hone their skills-anything that
adds to their pleasure in preparing, serving and
eating good food. To reserve a space for your
product, call the **Fine Cooking Advertising**
Department, 1-800-283-7252.

Solid Hard Rock Maple
Butcherblocks



Buy Direct
And Save
Several styles
and finishes
available.

Call Now For A
Free Brochure
1-800-473-1992

Duhnke FURNITURE
P.O. Box 26191 • Shawnee Mission, KS 66225

Have a Hot Attack!

Jamaican Chile Peppers



Flown Fresh from the Caribbean
Gourmet Gift Baskets containing the
world's hottest and most flavorful chile
peppers, sauces and unique recipes.
To order Gift Baskets or a FREE Catalog
and Newsletter call
1-800-522-3227
Jabea House • Box 482 • Hollis, NH 03049

LEARN COOKING AT HOME



Home Study program teaches selection, preparation, serving of
appetizing and nutritious foods. Experts teach you how. Great
recipes too! Diploma Awarded. **FREE brochure. No salesman.**

Lifetime Career Schools Name _____ Age _____
Dept. F10884 Address _____
101 Harrison Street City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Archbald, PA 18403
☐ Send a cooking brochure, OR instead, send info on: ☐ Sewing/Dressmaking
☐ Doll Repair ☐ Floristry ☐ Secretarial ☐ Bookbinding ☐ Landscaping ☐ Small Business

OR CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-326-9221 Mon-Fri 9:00 - 5:00 E.S.T.



BBQ BRANDS

WESTERN GRILL-TOPS

Delight and amuse your dinner guests with Fish Bones, Cactus or Cattle Brands seared onto fish, steak or veggies. Grilling instructions and warranty included. 18" or 22" round charcoal grill-top - 11" x 19" gas grill-top
Send \$25 + 3.50 S&H. Check or M.O.

Great Grills Company
P.O. Box 58662, St. Louis, MO 63158



Attention Coffee Fanatics!

World's best coffee because you
"Roast Your Own"
Fun video shows you how.
Fast! Easy! No special equipment.
\$17.95 incl. s & h (NYS res. add sales tax)
BG Media, Inc., P.O. Box 198, Dept. F, Genoa, NY 13071
Credit Card Orders: 1-800-784-7117



"Chitarra"

Imported traditional Italian pasta cutter.
Handmade from European Beech, Teak, brass and glass. Individually numbered and signed. Delicious recipes and instructions included. Send cheque or money order for \$196 incl. shipping to:

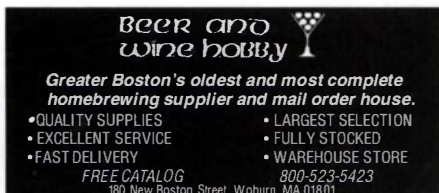
FORM & FUNCTION
402 W. Wilson St.
Monticello, Illinois 61856
Tel. (217) 762-2445



VIDALIA® ONION VINAIGRETTES

CHOOSE FROM ORIGINAL AND HONEY MUSTARD
AVAILABLE IN GIFT BOXES, BASKETS AND ASSORTMENTS
PRICES START AT \$12.95 FOR TWO 12-OZ. BOTTLES
ORDER TOLL FREE 1-800-221-5050

HENDRIX FARMS
P.O. Box 175
Metter, Georgia 30439



Beer and Wine Hobby

Greater Boston's oldest and most complete homebrewing supplier and mail order house.

- QUALITY SUPPLIES
- EXCELLENT SERVICE
- FAST DELIVERY
- LARGEST SELECTION
- FULLY STOCKED
- WAREHOUSE STORE

FREE CATALOG 800-523-5423
180 New Boston Street, Woburn, MA 01801

BRING A LITTLE BIT OF ITALY INTO YOUR HOME

Reggiano Parmigiano - Aged over 3 yrs. 5.99 lb.
Extra Virgin First Cold Pressed Olive Oil 4.99 liter 11.99 gal.
Porcini Mushrooms - 11.00 ¼ lb., 20.00 ½ lb.
Other Gourmet Specialty Items Available
To order or for information and free brochure
Teitel Brothers **1-800-850-7055** Prices Plus S/H



CHILE LA ISLA

Gourmet chile peppers: Roasted & Individually Quick-Frozen (IQF). We also have Organic Dry Red Chiles. All grower-direct to you! Shipped UPS nationwide.
Chile La Isla, P.O. Box 1379, Fabens, Texas 79838
(800) 895-4603



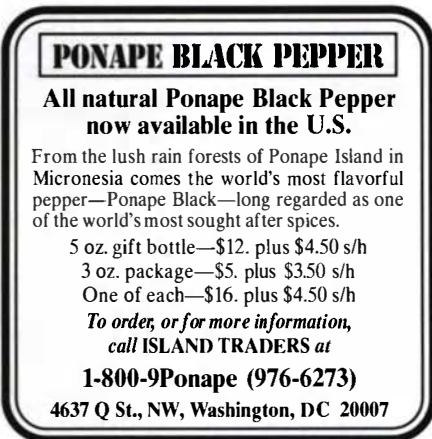
Maharaja Spice Land

SPICES
Prepare exotic fat free Indian/Pakistani dishes at home. Order an authentic spice kit containing a variety of eight imported **Indian Spices** and receive copies of easy to cook original recipes free. Spice kit \$19.95 plus \$5 first class shipping and handling. Any inquiries, please call.
Maharaja Spice Land
18627 Brookhurst St., Suite 322
Fountain Valley, CA 92708
1-800-240-0112
Visa, MasterCard & American Express accepted



chesapeake bay gourmet

Enjoy the succulent taste of "Chesapeake Bay Country's" finest seafood: gourmet crab cakes, crab imperial, crab quiche, and other selected handmade seafood products. Brochure available. Write or place your order by phone.
CHESAPEAKE BAY GOURMET
P.O. Box 456
Chester, MD 21619
Visa and MasterCard accepted • 1-800-432-CRAB



PONAPE BLACK PEPPER

All natural Ponape Black Pepper now available in the U.S.
From the lush rain forests of Ponape Island in Micronesia comes the world's most flavorful pepper—Ponape Black—long regarded as one of the world's most sought after spices.
5 oz. gift bottle—\$12. plus \$4.50 s/h
3 oz. package—\$5. plus \$3.50 s/h
One of each—\$16. plus \$4.50 s/h
To order, or for more information, call **ISLAND TRADERS at**
1-800-9Ponape (976-6273)
4637 Q St., NW, Washington, DC 20007



Now Available

LE CORDON BLEU COFFEES

Unrivalled for Richness
Slow Roasted/Deep Flavor

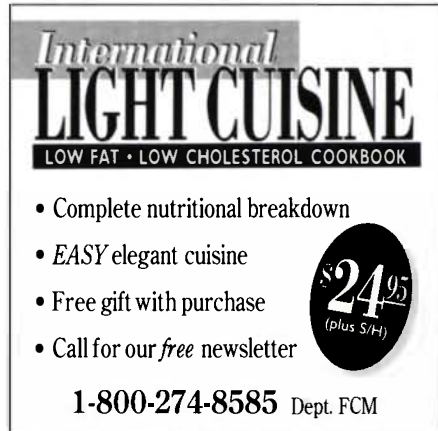
Sampler Pack Includes
1 can each of Mocha, Colombian & Decaf (Brazilian can be substituted). Included is a tin of the delicious Le Cordon Bleu butter cookies. These galettes are made with 25% butter. The famed cookies have received rave reviews.
The sampler pack with reorder forms is \$50.00. (\$6.00 shipping).

(800) 888-4046



Specialties by Louise Cookbook

\$16.50 (includes shipping)
LOUISE'S FAMOUS CARROT CAKE & CHEESECAKE!!
170 Easy Recipes • Free Recipe List w/SASE • (916) 722-3058
6937F LeHavre • Citrus Heights • CA 95621 • Satisfaction Guaranteed



International LIGHT CUISINE

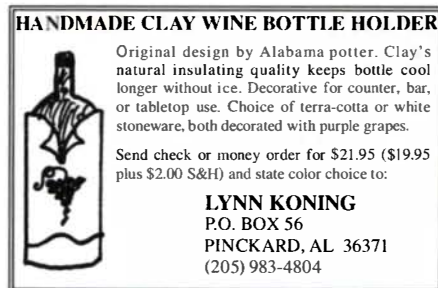
LOW FAT • LOW CHOLESTEROL COOKBOOK

- Complete nutritional breakdown
- EASY elegant cuisine
- Free gift with purchase
- Call for our free newsletter

\$24.95 (plus S/H)
1-800-274-8585 Dept. FCM

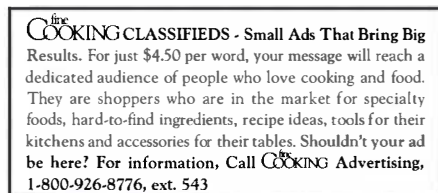
FLAIR WITH FOOD!

Our catering companion guidebook system designed exclusively for you! Start your own catering company with our proven business basics and culinary guidance. **CALL TODAY** for introductory presentation:
FABULOUS FEASTS, INC. (216) 256-2609



HANDMADE CLAY WINE BOTTLE HOLDER

Original design by Alabama potter. Clay's natural insulating quality keeps bottle cool longer without ice. Decorative for counter, bar, or tabletop use. Choice of terra-cotta or white stoneware, both decorated with purple grapes.
Send check or money order for \$21.95 (\$19.95 plus \$2.00 S&H) and state color choice to:
LYNN KONING
P.O. BOX 56
PINCKARD, AL 36371
(205) 983-4804



COOKING CLASSIFIEDS

Small Ads That Bring Big Results. For just \$4.50 per word, your message will reach a dedicated audience of people who love cooking and food. They are shoppers who are in the market for specialty foods, hard-to-find ingredients, recipe ideas, tools for their kitchens and accessories for their tables. Shouldn't your ad be here? For information, Call **COOKING Advertising**, 1-800-926-8776, ext. 543

The CLASSIFIED rate is \$4.50/word, minimum 15 words. Payment must accompany order. Send to Fine Cooking Adm., Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Oct/Nov deadline is July 18, 1994.

FREE COOKBOOK CATALOG. Call 415-267-5980 or write SHERLOCK'S EATS, 3620 18th St., Suite 22, San Francisco, CA 94110.

STERLING - 600 PATTERNS, piece/place/set. Registry and layaway available. Since 1892. LITTMAN'S, 151 Granby St., Norfolk, VA 23510. 1-800-FOUND-IT; 1-800-368-6348.

LIKE KITCHEN GADGETS/COOKING? PAM-PEREDCHEF needs home party demonstrators. Fun. Easy. Excellent Pay. (708) 323-8557.

LEARN HEALTHY NUTRITIOUS COOKING at home. Selection, preparation, serving of appetizing, nutritious foods. Free brochure. LIFETIME CAREER SCHOOLS, Dept. FT08X3, (800) 326-9221.

ADVERTISER INDEX

America State By State 19
American Chocolate Mould 75
American Spoon 76
Antique Mall & Crown Restaurant 74
Arden's Gardens 78
Armeno Coffee 78
Atiu Coffee 79
BG Media, Inc. 80
Beer & Wine Hobby 80
Belleweather Chocolate Scones 79
Benson's Seasonings 15
The Brisker 79
California Winemakers Guild 7
The Captain's Fresh Lobster 17
Chesapeake Bay Gourmet 80
Chesapeake Express Ltd. 78
Chile La Isla 80
China Replacements 78
CMC Co. 79
Colavita USA 7
The Cookbook Club 5
Cooking With Class 76
Covington Ranch Beef 15
Cucina Classica Italiana 11
Daylight Enterprises 79
Desert Glory 68
Diamond Vee™ Knife Sharpener 71
Don Alfonso Foods 19
Duhnke Furniture 79
DuPont Co. Corian 83
DuPont Co. Silverstone 2
El Rancho Products 78
Fabulous Feasts 80
Flash in the Pan 19
Floura Wild Rice 79
Form & Function 80
Gerber Blades 15
Great Grills Co. 80
Great Plains Meats 9
Hendrix Farms 80
Herb 'n' Lore 79
Hilyard & Hilquist 17
Indianapolis Cul. Inst. 10
Int'l Home Cooking 71
Int'l Light Cuisine 80
Int'l Wine Accessories 74
Island Traders 80
Jabea House 79
Jamison Farm 78
Lamson & Goodnow 10
Le Cordon Bleu Coffees 80
Le Cordon Bleu Cookbook/Videos 7
Le Cordon Bleu Cooking School 19
Lifetime Career Schools 79
Lion House 78
Lynn Koning 80
Magnolia Products 78
Maharaja Spice Land 80
Mail Order Gourmet 16
Mangia Software 75
Mariner Tours 17
Melissa's By Mail 78
Miko Marinade 78
M.J. Gourmet Gifts 79
Narrow Way Co. 16
National Dairy Board 21
New England Culinary Institute 15
Peter Kump's N.Y. Cooking School 76
Professional Cutlery Direct 78
Redi-Base 79
Sam & Sharon's 9
Scottsdale Culinary Inst. 75
Shaw Guides 78, 79
Specialties by Louise 80
The Spice Rack 78
Stonehill Farm 79
Sullivan College 9
Taste For Gourmet Gallery 76
Teitel Bros. 80
Trillium International 78
U.S. Personal Chef 16
Whole Earth Access 75
Wilma Saxton 78
Windsor Vineyards 15
The Wooden Spoon 71
Wüsthof-Trident 17

RECIPES

APPETIZERS

Marinated Cherry Tomatoes over Warm Provolone Garlic Bread 51
Cha Gio (Vietnamese Spring Rolls) 30-33

BEVERAGES

Infused Grappas :
Chamomile, Cherry or Grape, Dried Fig, Honey, Peppermint, Raspberry, Rosemary 54

BREADS

Bruschetta 37
Parsley Croutons 50-51
Warm Provolone Garlic Bread 51

DESSERTS, CAKES & PASTRY

Apple Almond Cobbler 67
Blackberry Lemon Cobbler 66-67
Blueberry Grunt 67
Cappuccino Bavarian Cream 47
Chocolate Wafer Cookies 47
Cocoa Sauce 47
Crème Anglaise 43-47
Fresh Mint Ice-Cream Sandwiches 47
Zinfandel Poached Pears with Poiré William Mascarpone 39

MAIN DISHES

Meats

Braised Polpettone (Meatballs) 38-39
Chagio (Vietnamese Spring Rolls) 30-33
Picadillo (Meat and Fruit Filling) 62-63

Poultry

Roast Chicken 55-58

Vegetable

Chiles Rellenos (Mexican Stuffed Peppers) 60-63
Ratatouille on the Grill 22-24

PASTA

Angel Hair Pasta with Just-Warmed Tomato Sauce and Avocado 51
Fresh Zucchini Lasagna 37-38

SALADS

Spicy White Bean Salad with Summer Corn and Crunchy Cucumbers 36-37
Marinated Cherry Tomatoes over Warm Provolone Garlic Bread 51

SAUCES, CONDIMENTS & SEASONINGS

Béchamel Sauce 37-38
Duxelles 71
Just-Warmed Tomato Sauce 51
Nogada (Walnut Cream Sauce) 63
Pan-Reduced Sauce (for chicken) 59
Pesto 77
Salsa de Jitomate (Tomato Sauce) 63
Thick Cream 63

SIDE DISHES

Ratatouille on the Grill 22-24
Roasted Garlic 59
Roasted Vegetables 59
Steamed Spinach 59

SOUPS, STEWS & STOCKS

Cream of Roasted Tomato Soup with Parsley Croutons 50-51

TECHNIQUES

Baking cobblers 65-67
Braising 36, 38-39
Calculating percentage of calories from fat 69-70
Charring peppers 60-61
Cooking vegetables with salt 13
Cooking with tomatoes 49-51
Curdling: *crème anglaise* 44; remedying ganache 4-6
Curing meat 6, 12-13
Decorating with sauces 46-47
Flavoring grappas 53-54
Freezing: basil 77; peppers 61; tomatoes 50
Frying: peppers 61-62; spring rolls 33
Grilling: bread 37; vegetables 22-24
Ice-cream making 46
Kneading dough 4
Marinating meats 13
Menu planning 34-37
Omelets, making 8
Peeling: peppers 60-61; tomatoes 70
Poaching fruit 39
Reviving wilted vegetables 12
Roasting: chicken 55-58; garlic 58-59; tomatoes 49-50; vegetables 36-38, 58-59
Saucemaking: béchamel 38; *crème anglaise* 43-47; pan-reduced sauce for chicken 59; tempering egg-based sauces 43-44; testing for doneness 44; tomato sauce 63
Steaming: dumplings 65-67; spinach 59
Storing: basil 77; fish 29; tomatoes 49; vinegar 8
Tempering egg-based sauces 43-44
Trussing chicken 56-57
Whipping cream 39
Whisking eggs and sugar to the ribbon 43-44

INGREDIENTS

Basil: freezing 77; growing 77; infusing in vinegar 77; making pesto 77
Beans, dried, preparing 37
Chicken: choosing 56-58; roasting 55-58; testing for doneness 58; trussing 56-57
Chile peppers (see Peppers)
Clams, cleaning 4
Fish, choosing 25-29
Garlic, roasting 58-59
Gelatin, dissolving 46
Tomatoes: choosing 49; freezing 50; peeling 70; ripening 49; roasting 49-50
Mushrooms: dried, preparing 31-32; duxelles 71
Pancetta 10
Peppers: battering 61-62; charring 60-61; deveining 61; freezing 61; peeling 60-61; stuffing 61
Prosciutto 10
Rice noodles, dried, preparing 31-32
Rice paper, preparing 32
Vegetables: grilling 22-24; roasting 36-38, 58-59
Vinegar: infusing with basil 77; storing 8

TOOLS

Cast iron, cleaning 4
Knives: sharpening 40-42; steeling 40, 69
Whisks 43

A Fig Too Far



I've always been an improvisational cook. You have to understand that from the outset. A dash of this, a splash of that. An improbable lot of things hauled out of the refrigerator and finessed into making a splendid meal. The kitchen is my studio, spoon and spatula my brush and palette knife. I have no fear of innovation. Wild new juxtapositions of taste and texture hold no terror for me. Transported by the thrill of invention, I slice and stir and sample, carefully selecting

herbs and grinding spices as a painter might grind his colors.

I also like to make use of what bounty nature sends my way. So when I lived in California and nature sent me a bounteous fig tree in my backyard, my culinary thoughts naturally turned to figs.

A few words about this tree. This was no lightweight fig tree. No callow sapling. Planted by the original Italian inhabitants of the house at least thirty years before, this was a true patriarch of a fig tree. When we moved in, I pruned it ruthlessly, removing entirely one huge branch the Italians had lovingly propped up with a 4x4. The tree's overbearing presence was hardly diminished.

And speaking of overbearing. The tree produced two crops of figs each year: a little fig in the spring, and then the big fig in late summer. When laden with fruit, the branches drooped nearly to the ground. Under the canopy, the world was nothing but leaves and figs. You could pluck them with both hands and stuff them into your mouth, feeling like an utterly primeval primate. But we couldn't keep up with the figs. The birds couldn't keep up with the figs. Nobody could keep up with the figs. By autumn, the lawn and walk were covered. The figs moldered and grew slimy. We slipped on figs. We slithered through figs. We were skiing in figs, forever scraping them off our shoes.

In a word, we had figs. I made fig pastries, fig preserves, fig jam. Cookies with figs, fig tarts, fig pies. Fig bread, fig pudding, baked figs. In short, fig confections of every type and description. But who needs to eat that much dessert? Surely, something nonconfectionery could be made with figs.

Now, chicken braised with vegetables and spices and herbs is one of my favorite improvisational forms. Chicken seems to be just the right straight man for my wilder flights of culinary fancy: always polite,

never intrusive. So, I set out to contrive something pairing chicken with figs. I sautéed some onions, one of my predictable opening gambits. Tossed in the chicken pieces to brown a bit—a standard second move. So far, so good. Then I tossed in a half dozen quartered figs. The pace began to quicken. From then on, it was pure invention. Probably a bit of chicken stock, maybe some mushrooms. I don't now recall. Some wine poured in with a reckless hand. Spices too, quite likely, although I can't say which ones. The flavors began to mingle, like party guests after their second beer. It was coming along well visually, too, as the sauce developed a rich, rosy blush. Then I decided it needed a bit more edge, a little more piquancy. In went the juice of a lemon. Within seconds, the entire mixture turned green.

So? Green is a perfectly ordinary color for food. But not this green. This was the most astonishing, electric, glow-in-the-dark, neon green imaginable. A green you might see reflected from oil-slicked streets after a rain. A green you'd find collecting, drip by drip, beneath a rusty barrel marked with the international biohazard symbol. A green you would back away from, slowly, keeping your eye on it all the time.

We ate it anyway. Over rice. It tasted very good, really—but, oh, the color. It didn't help that the pigment seemed to be oil soluble. Droplets of chicken fat beaded up on the white plates as if they might etch the china. Grains of iridescent green rice sparkled like so much junk jewelry.

Where did this color come from? Who knows. The cast-iron pan I was cooking in may have had something to do with it. And they say natural dyes are always delightfully subtle. Humph.

Surely there are many wonderful recipes using meat and figs. Someday I may even gather the courage to try some of them. But this was my first—and my very, very last—improvisation on chicken with figs.

—Jan Stetson
Arlington, Massachusetts ♦

We buy stories about culinary adventures. Send them to Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

You just bought a beautiful new Corian® countertop and before you know it your son stains it when he drops a pitcher of grape juice, your husband uses it to put out his cigar, and your daughter cuts into it with her new Ginsu knife, so you rub it down with a little cleanser and it looks like



Sure, you'll love Corian® for its sensuous look and feel. And its 38 different colors. But there's an even better reason why you buy Corian®. You buy it because people drop things. And spill things. And when they do, it's nice to know you have a surface that can stand up to it.

Simply put, Corian® always looks brand new. Scratches are easily removed (minor ones with cleanser, major ones with sandpaper), and stains wipe away with ease because Corian® is completely non-porous.

So you can buy Corian® for its seamless beauty and elegant design. But you won't appreciate its true beauty until someone drops a jug of grape juice on it.

To learn more, call 1-800-4-CORIAN.

CORIAN
SURFACES

Created For Life.™



Tropical Appliance

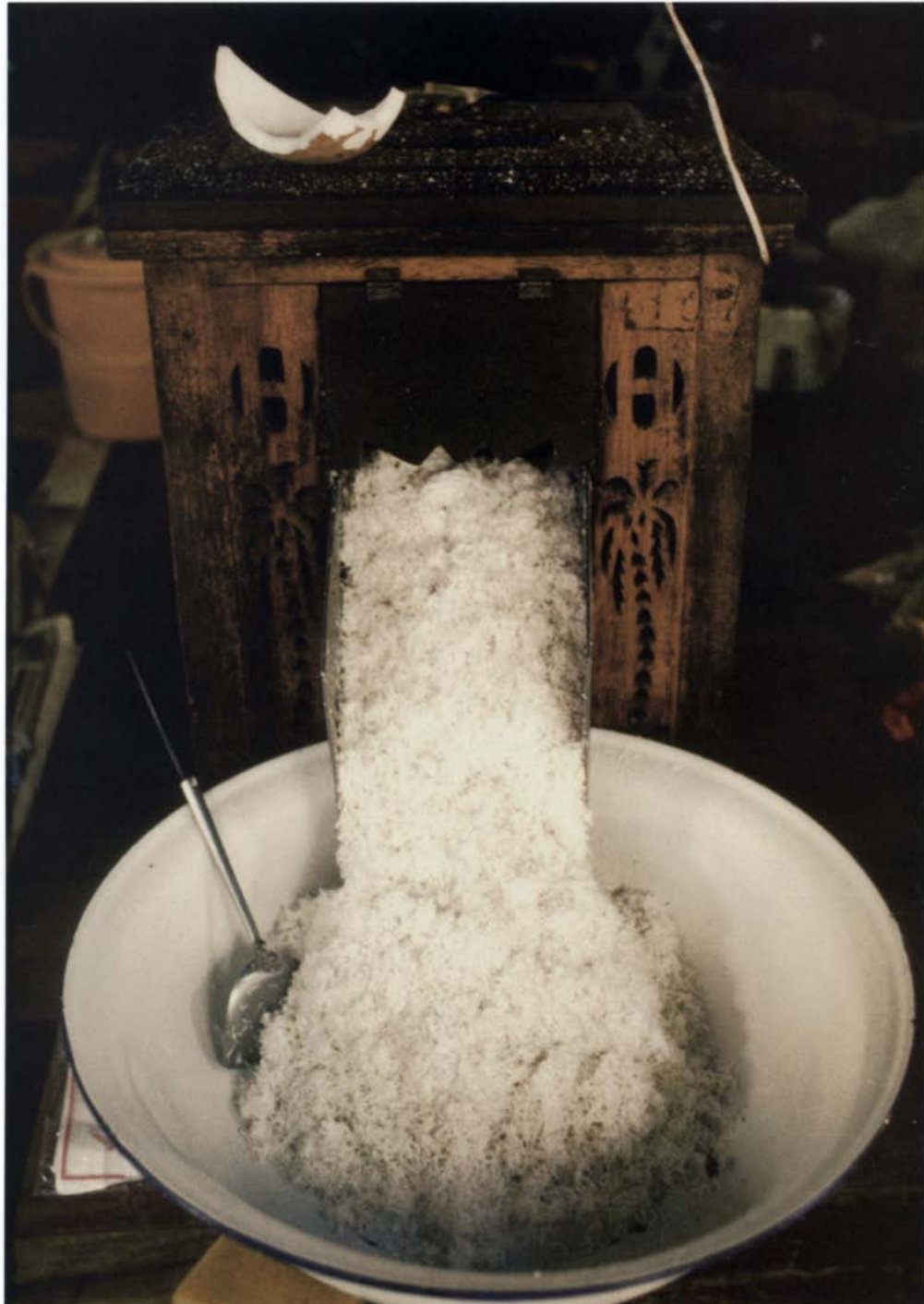


Photo: Faith Echtermeyer

Coconut grinder in a Bangkok market.